

ABSTRACT

SHAPARD, ROBERT PAINE. Building an Inland Sea: Clarks Hill Lake on the Upper Savannah and the Twentieth-Century Lives, Land, and River Hidden by its Waters. (Under the direction of Matthew Morse Booker.)

This thesis recounts the origins of the dam and reservoir built by the Army Corps of Engineers in the late 1940s and early 1950s on the Savannah River, near Clarks Hill, South Carolina, and explores the experiences of people required to sell property and move to make way for the reservoir. To build the Clarks Hill hydropower project, the Corps acquired more than 140,000 acres on both sides of the river in Georgia and South Carolina, with about half that acreage flooded to create the reservoir. The history of people who had owned land before the Corps, and in some cases lived on it, has receded from awareness for many who visit or observe the lake today, to the point that it seems more like a natural feature than a product of large-scale engineering. That underlying history receded further when Congress changed the name of the project from Clarks Hill to the J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake in 1987, in that Thurmond did not stand for the specific residents and landscape impacted by the dam. Using oral-history interviews conducted by the author, and drawing on the written record as well, this thesis seeks to reclaim space in the story of the project for the people dispossessed of land and homes. The power of the federal government effectively limited the options for those who otherwise would have chosen to keep their land. But they had stronger connections to the land, and found more value in it, than the government and supporters of the dam explicitly recognized in the arguments they made for the project, and in early assessments of the reservoir basin. More people lived within the zone of land acquisition, they were a more diverse group, they felt greater bonds to the land, and saw more potential in it for the future. It was not such a used-up, vacant, and valueless landscape.

Building an Inland Sea: Clarks Hill Lake on the Upper Savannah
And the Twentieth-Century Lives, Land, and River
Hidden by its Waters

by
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DEDICATION

To Sarah, Ella, and Samantha, and the members of my family tree in its broadest sense, who make everything possible and worthwhile.

BIOGRAPHY

Robert P. Shapard was born in Atlanta, grew up in Griffin, Ga., and graduated from Williams College in 1989 with a bachelor's degree in history. He briefly indulged a passion for golf in Florida after college, and returned to school at the University of Georgia to earn a master's degree in journalism in 1994. Rob worked as an editor at *American City & County* magazine and a newspaper reporter for the *Griffin Daily News* and Durham *Herald-Sun* for thirteen years before entering the master's program in U.S. history at North Carolina State University. In August 2009, he will follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather by becoming a graduate of N.C. State, and will pursue a doctorate in history at UNC Chapel Hill.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When one sits down to thank all the people who helped to make an accomplishment possible, the list can get out of hand rather quickly. These acknowledgements, therefore, are incomplete. But to begin in general terms, I thank the superb faculty, staff members, and fellow graduate students in the Department of History at N.C. State University with whom I have interacted since 2007. It has been a true privilege and blessing to learn from all of them, and I will carry the department's banner proudly in the years to come.

I came to N.C. State in large part because of the encouragement and kindness of Professor Matthew M. Booker. He believed in my ability, as a forty-something student, to find a place and succeed in the graduate program, and to continue to the doctoral level. His confidence came at a critical time, and I will be eternally grateful to him. The guidance, insight, support, and patience of Prof. Booker and my committee members, professors Katherine Mellen Charron, David Gilmartin, and Blair Kelley, have been incredibly enriching and deeply appreciated. I also had the great fortune to work two semesters as a teaching assistant with Prof. Nancy Mitchell, who always provided an excellent example and wise counsel.

For opening their homes and sharing their memories, I also thank my interview subjects: Kathleen Beggs, Bobby Edmonds, Ben Fortson, J.M. Holloway Jr., and Larry Pinson. I am grateful as well to the Corps of Engineers staff at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam who welcomed me over the past two years, in particular ranger David Quebedeaux, and to librarians Diane Poteat in Lincolnton, Ga., and Paul Brown in McCormick, S.C.

My wonderful parents, sisters and brother, and parents in-law helped carry me along throughout this work. The confidence and love of my wife and children enabled me to start on the path of exploring and teaching history. Their support has come in many forms, from the countless errands and activities they did while I stayed home with my documents and tapes, to their valiant efforts to show interest in an old dam somewhere in Georgia.

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INTRODUCTION:

'No Problem of Consequence' in the Path of Clarks Hill Dam

The Savannah River was a blessing in many ways to the four Reid siblings, who lived together in an old farmhouse of Georgia pine beams and boards their father had built, about a quarter-mile from the river. The river drained the land on which they had raised corn, wheat, cotton, hay, garden vegetables, and livestock for several decades, continuing into the 1940s. Down a steep hill at the river bank, the Reids built a plain wooden landing from which they and their frequent visitors could launch their bateaux and get on the water to fish or pole out to a small island in the middle. Except when the river was low, they could hear the water flowing over rocky shoals from their kitchen, porch or bedrooms at night, a sound that perhaps helped take their minds off the stifling heat during the long summers, in a house that never had electricity.¹

But the Savannah also proved a conduit for uninvited change and distress for the Reids, when the federal government decided to dam the stretch of river that flowed near their farm. In that sense, the river, with its inherent power for spinning turbines to generate electricity, and also its history of occasionally flooding the city of Augusta, Ga., was a factor in forcing the Reids from the home they had occupied their entire lives. Congress authorized a dam on the Savannah River in 1944 near a scruffy, rail-side community in South Carolina called Clarks Hill, a couple miles from the Reid farm and about twenty-two miles upstream of

¹ Larry Pinson, interview by author, Lincoln County, GA, March 22, 2008; Larry Pinson, e-mail message to author, March 18, 2008; all interview tapes in author's possession.

Augusta. Contractors for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started construction two years later, but a political debate and the ebb and flow of congressional funding slowed the construction, and it took until approximately 1951 for the project to start backing up the Savannah's water. The water level then climbed rapidly due to steady rains, and the dam swelled a long stretch of the river and tributaries into the 71,000-acre Clarks Hill Lake.²

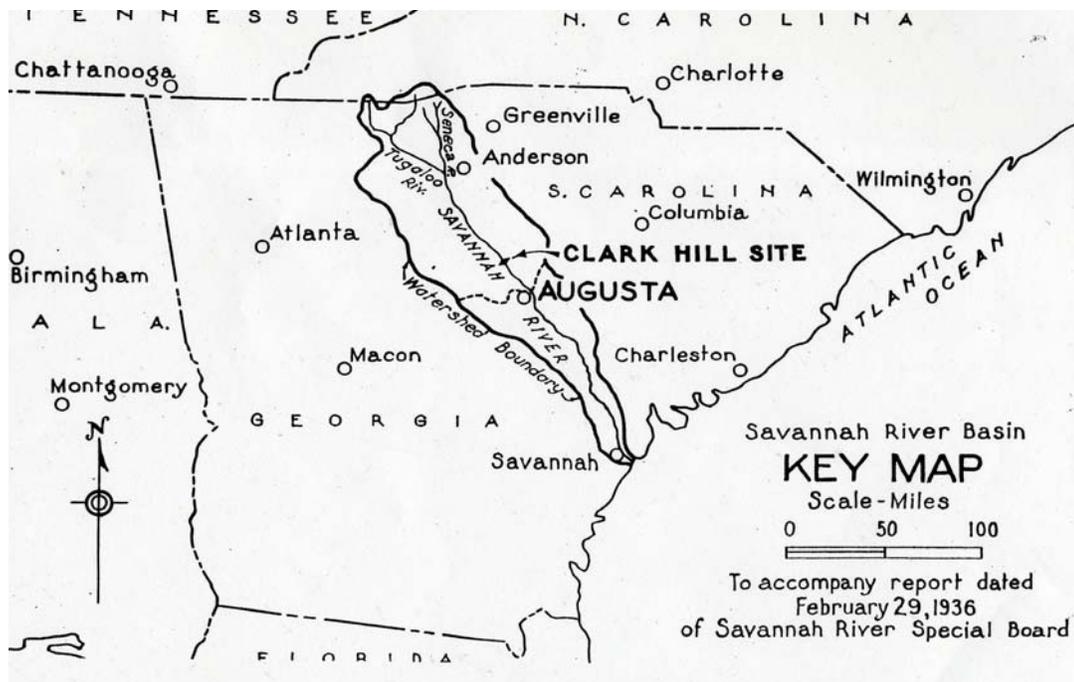


Figure 1: Map showing Savannah watershed and Clarks Hill Dam location. Savannah River Special Board, Report to President Roosevelt, 1936 (Note: The scale listed on this map is incorrect).

² Henry E. Barber and Allen R. Gann, *History of Savannah District 1829-1989* (Savannah, GA: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1989), 419-425; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Pertinent Data, J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake," fact sheet dated Dec. 19, 1997 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam and Lake Visitor Center, Clarks Hill, S.C.).

Today, the lake covers all but the highest point of the former Reid farm. The hilltop on which their home sat now is one of the hundred or so islands in the lake. Like that submerged land, the broader impacts of the project on people such as the Reids, and the ways in which they reacted to losing land, are obscured from view.

This thesis highlights a central tension in the name currently attached to the project – the J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake. The name suggests an unequivocal embracing by Thurmond, the longtime U.S. senator from South Carolina, of such large-scale federal interventions as represented by the dam. The name, therefore, sheds little helpful light on Thurmond’s actual personal and political history, in which resistance to federal actions was a dominant and sometimes contradictory theme. Nor does the name evoke the history of the people who were dispossessed of land and homes by the project.

Drawing on the written record as well as oral-history interviews, this thesis seeks to uncover a portion of that history of dispossession, in the experiences and reactions of the Georgians and South Carolinians from whom the government acquired property for Clarks Hill. Many of the impacted people had felt stronger ties to the land and perceived more value in it than acknowledged by the government and the proponents of the dam, who downplayed the human presence on the land and its value for continued agriculture. This thesis also explores the origins of the dam, connecting it both to the conservationism of Franklin D. Roosevelt, manifested in Roosevelt’s strong advocacy for damming rivers, and to the southern boosterism that sought every advantage in luring new industry to the South.

The public story that the Corps and others tell about Clarks Hill today generally does not include the perceptions of place and the connections to the land and river of those who had to

sell property, and in some cases move for the project. No vibrant collective memory of their experiences has developed, and they are not what local or out-of-town users of the lake typically think about when they come to Clarks Hill to fish, sail, hunt, camp or otherwise recreate on the lake. The Corps had set the course of the public narrative of Clarks Hill early in the project. Inside the powerhouse, it built a public reception area with a glassed balcony overlooking the generator room. The space that housed the seven generators was large, at seventy feet high and 514 feet long, and the view from the balcony was meant to impress visitors with the magnitude and technological wonder of the project. The public area also included an exhibit that showed the Corps at work in developing river basins for multiple purposes, telling a story of progress, but without a sense of the costs.³

A gap opened from the start between perceptions of the lake, and the specific landscape that preceded it. Congress widened the gap when it dropped the locally originating name of Clarks Hill in 1987, and renamed the project for Strom Thurmond, the former South Carolina governor, Dixiecrat presidential nominee and enduring senator from Edgefield County.⁴ Edgefield is near but not directly adjacent to the lake, and the Corps did not acquire any land within that county for the lake. Thurmond, therefore, does not serve as a direct reminder or symbol of the particular place that the lake transformed. Naming the lake for Thurmond takes us further away from an awareness of what preceded the lake.

³ Corps of Engineers, "Master Plan for Development and Management Clark Hill Reservoir," September 1950 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam), 9.

⁴ Renaming described in *Savannah News-Press*, Feb. 28, 1988; the author has called the project Clarks Hill throughout this thesis for the sake of simplicity, and because it makes more sense to use that name in the context of the 1940s and 50s. Due to a typographical error in the congressional authorization for the project, it was called Clark Hill for more than thirty years before Congress corrected it to Clarks Hill in 1980, via a bill introduced by Sen. Strom Thurmond; also see Bobby Edmonds, *McCormick County: Land of Cotton* (McCormick, SC: Cedar Hill Unlimited, 2001), 205 and 297.

Thurmond, whose image looms over the conference room at the dam's visitor center from a nearly life-sized portrait, does represent the tremendous power of the federal government to reshape a place, its inhabitants, and their memory. Along with removing people and structures and altering the nonhuman environment, the employment of federal power also reordered the racial makeup of this specific landscape, although that was not an aim that advocates explicitly voiced. The project turned a rural place where blacks and whites often lived on the same property or near each other, into a more formally segregated setting with separate public parks and beaches for the two races – Mistletoe State Park and Keg Creek Negro Park in Georgia, and Baker Creek State Park and Hickory Knob State Park for Negroes in South Carolina. In the lobby of the power plant at the dam, the two sets of bathrooms that remain today no longer have signs directing “white” and “colored” users, but they provide a physical reminder of the segregation furthered by the project.⁵

As in all cases in which people had preferred to keep their land, the Corps prevailed in its desire for the Reid property. The Corps and other advocates of the dam made a classic and effective “greater good” argument for the project, gaining the approval of Congress in the name of generating electricity for the region, holding back its waters during heavy rains so the river would not swamp streets in Augusta, and ensuring a navigable shipping channel on the river between Augusta and Savannah. Boosters also emphasized the lake's recreation

⁵ A.N. Moye, Georgia state parks director, Atlanta, Ga., to district engineer, Corps of Engineers, Savannah, Ga., March 22, 1950; and Chas. H. Flory, South Carolina state forester, Columbia, S.C., to district engineer, Corps of Engineers, Savannah, Ga., March 1, 1950; both letters reproduced in Corps of Engineers, “Master Plan for Development and Management Clark Hill Reservoir,” Exhibit 4.

potential, although Congress initially did not designate recreation as one of the dam's fundamental purposes.⁶

Holding up the promise of benefits for the entire upper Savannah valley, and standing on the approval of Congress and the authority and resources of the federal government, the Corps had the advantage when it moved to acquire property. It had the option of reaching a settlement with owners without any court involvement, which happened in many cases. It also condemned properties. In those cases, the government deposited money with the court at what it considered the appropriate price. The owner could accept that price or challenge it in court. The legal question for the jury in such condemnation cases was to determine the just compensation, not whether the government could take the land.⁷ Given the limits, the meaningful aspect was not that people like the Reids succumbed to the authority of the federal government, but how they expressed themselves within those limits. The owners and residents of approximately 2,000 tracts of land acquired by the Corps did have a range of meaningful reactions, including a clear sense of loss.

Remembering their experiences is meaningful in part because of the recurrence of sometimes-extreme droughts in the South. In recent years, when droughts started to seriously pinch water supplies – for current users, as well as the future users that growth would bring – officials in states like Georgia have tended to ponder creating new sources as much as they

⁶ Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 422; and Corps of Engineers, "Project Purposes," undated fact sheet (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

⁷ The government's land-acquisition files give a view of the condemnation process, as does a Jan. 21, 1949 memorandum from the chief of the Clarks Hill mapping section to the chief of the real-estate branch of the Savannah District, Corps of Engineers, files for Segments 4 and 5, Box 8 of 45 (stored at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam); also see Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 427; and Wikipedia, "Eminent Domain," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eminent_domain (accessed April 29, 2008).

have looked to water conservation, and it is likely they will continue to explore construction of new reservoirs. The history of a previous reservoir is a reminder that the talk of perceived needs and benefits, and the display of engineering prowess, can obscure what existed before the reservoir, and how people experienced the change.

This study observes that people not keen to sell their land tended to show their discontent in fairly indirect ways, considering that, by the late 1940s, the federal government had a track record of acquiring large amounts of land for projects aimed at large-scale benefits; its power to get the property it targeted was clear. Acquiescence to the Corps was a recognition of that power, and a result of other aspects of the people and the times. But it was not a sign that the impacted people did not care about what they lost. In fact, they felt strong connections to the land and features like the river, which had been important in shaping their identities.

For those who have known only Clarks Hill Lake and never experienced the landscape before it was transformed, the lake can seem natural, like it has always been there and was created by a force other than mankind. On the Georgia side, Lincoln County officials have dubbed their lakeside county “Georgia’s Freshwater Coast,” and just across the state line in South Carolina, McCormick County boosters pitch theirs as the “Gem of the Freshwater Coast.” They have renewed an inland-sea image used from the early days of the lake project, by observers such as Andrew Sparks, a reporter from Atlanta who drove over to see the steadily rising reservoir in 1952. Sparks wrote that, with the sparkling water running to the horizon, it looked to him almost like an ocean, or at least like a large sound on the Georgia

coast.⁸ “Almost by a miracle, this red river that rises in the Blue Ridge becomes a lake as blue as the mountains themselves when its water is penned up and slowed down,” Sparks added. He described the reservoir more like a “miracle” of nature than a manmade facility that had required manipulating the natural environment on a large scale.

The Blue Ridge origins of the Savannah include the smaller waterways feeding the Chattooga River in the north Georgia mountains, and the tributaries in the highlands of the Carolinas that create the Toxaway and Whitewater rivers. In Georgia, the Chattooga flows into the Tugaloo, and the Toxaway and Whitewater form the Seneca in South Carolina. Near Anderson, S.C., the Tugaloo and Seneca come together to form the Savannah River. From that confluence, the Savannah runs 314 miles to the sea, carrying with it the water and sediment from 10,500 square miles of land. The river falls about 500 feet in elevation over its course from the Tugaloo-Seneca fork, the same drop as the Tennessee River and one of the qualities that gives the Savannah its potential for hydropower.⁹

Many landscapes that Americans value and describe with adjectives such as “natural” often have layers of prior human use that are hidden, Mark David Spence observes in *Dispossessing the Wilderness*. There can also be a history of humans intervening to create that “natural” landscape. Spence specifically describes the creation of the Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Glacier national parks in the American West in the late nineteenth and early

⁸ Andrew Sparks, “Georgia’s New Ocean Builds Up Behind Clark Hill Dam,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, Sept. 7, 1952.

⁹ Savannah River Special Board, “Clark Hill Navigation-Flood Control-Power Project, Savannah River, Georgia-South Carolina,” Report to President Roosevelt, Washington, D.C., Feb. 29, 1936, 4-5 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam); also Richard A. Bartlett, ed., *Rolling Rivers: An Encyclopedia of America’s Rivers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 82; and hearings of the Committee on Public Works, U.S. House of Representatives, 80th Cong., Mar. 1-3, 1948, transcript found in Edgar A. Brown Papers, MSS 91, folder L313, Special Collections, Clemson University.

twentieth centuries. Even as government officials worked to exclude ongoing, traditional uses of the lands by Native Americans, they simultaneously contended that humans never had really used or occupied the lands. In reality, Spence counters, “Americans are able to cherish their national parks today largely because native peoples either abandoned them involuntarily or were forcefully restricted to reservations.” Park officials denied both the historical and ongoing use by natives, and they promoted a view of the land as “uninhabited Eden” that should be roped off but accessible to vacationers in search of natural beauty.¹⁰

With the history recounted by Spence as one of many precursors, Clarks Hill can be seen as another point on a long continuum of dispossessions by the federal government, in the name of a perceived greater good. Taking over the role from the colonies and their European founders, the federal government pursued the work relentlessly of dispossessing Native Americans of their land into the twentieth century. By the Depression and then the buildup to World War Two, the government was marking new points on the continuum of dispossessions, among later generations of Americans, in places like the Smoky Mountains, the Tennessee River valley, Oak Ridge, Tenn., or on the Santee River in South Carolina. In southern Georgia, the Army bought about 360,000 acres in 1940 and built Camp Stewart as an anti-aircraft training facility, displacing about 713 families in the process. Before and during the war, “Army bases and defense plants sprang up throughout Dixie,” historian Bruce Schulman notes. “Farms and forests became factories and arsenals.”¹¹

¹⁰ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6 and 101.

¹¹ Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 96-97.

At a later date and in a different place, the federal government intervened to create a new landscape at Clarks Hill that many came to see as natural, thereby erasing a layer of previous human history. The Clarks Hill supporters and creators did not deny that people were using the land before the government acquired it for the lake. For the most part, they were not claiming to preserve an untouched beauty spot. But Clarks Hill advocates did downplay the potential human impacts of the lake.

Once the project was finished, there were unintended ironies. For example, the government established the Bussey Point Wilderness Area on about 2,500 acres to the north of the dam, not far from where Little River had entered the Savannah in Lincoln County, Ga. But before Clarks Hill, that area was neither a point nor a wilderness. It took the lake to envelope part of the land and make it a point, and Bussey was a prominent family name in the area. Corps survey maps show an inhabited crossroads in that area called Bussey, just south of Double Branches, and longtime residents remember features such as the busy grist mill the Bussey family had operated there.¹²

From Bussey to Broad River, and Pistol Creek to Keg Creek, the government acquired roughly 146,000 acres. The lake would cover 71,000 acres at its fullest, so the Corps gained ownership of more land beyond the water line than within it. The land lay within the Georgia counties of Columbia, Elbert, Lincoln, McDuffie, Warren, and Wilkes, and Abbeville and McCormick counties in South Carolina. The properties ranged from just a few acres to 200 acres or more, and in some cases totaled thousands of acres. While much of the land was unoccupied, the project forced a number of people and families to vacate their homes. In

¹² Corps of Engineers, "Clarks Hill Lake Preimpoundment Survey," Savannah, GA, 1939 (author borrowed copy from private citizen); and Joe M. Holloway Jr., interview by author, Lincoln County, GA, March 22, 2008.

addition, it displaced about 1,700 graves that were moved to other churches or to public cemeteries, and the Mulberry Christian Methodist Episcopal church was moved as well.¹³

There were unoccupied tracts like the 154 acres that E.J. and Norma Cliatt owned in Lincoln County, which included a farmhouse that had been vacant for several years, and barns and other farm buildings. The house was unpainted, its windows broken and partially grown over with brush. In the eyes of the government appraiser who visited the property in 1949, the land was in an “abandoned area.” Idle farm fields made up about thirty acres of the Cliatt tract, and the rest was in pines.¹⁴

However, a nearby parcel of 177 steeply rolling acres did have residents. Rose H. Flanigan lived in a five-room house that was fairly old but painted and in good condition overall, and it had electric lights in 1949, possibly from a battery system. Along with Flanigan, a tenant lived on the property in a smaller house that was in rough condition, worth only \$550, compared to the value of \$3,400 the government attached to the main home. Several members of the Flanigan family owned the property, some living locally and others outside the state. The tract included about sixty acres of uncultivated crop fields, thirty-five acres of pasture and the rest reverting to pines, and the government figured the structures and land were worth \$9,000. The location about five miles north of Lincolnton was within a

¹³ Corps of Engineers, unnamed fact sheet on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam; grave total found in *Lincoln Journal*, April 6, 1950; and total number of properties acquired is an estimate based on the land parcel logbook on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam, which shows individual tract numbers running up to 2,799, although not every number between one and 2,799 was assigned to a parcel.

¹⁴ Acquisition file for Tract G-623, E.J. and Norma Cliatt, on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam.

neighborhood of white landowners with black and white tenants, where there was “considerable idle land, some cattle and some general crops,” in the government’s words.¹⁵

Before Clarks Hill, the federal government had gained experience in “dispossessing” landscapes in the South and enhanced its power to transform such landscapes. In creating the Smoky Mountains National Park and the first dams of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the 1920s and 1930s, the government further established its authority for acquiring private lands to mold into an envisioned benefit for the broader region, and indeed the country. Studies of the construction of TVA dams and creation of the Smoky Mountains park help reveal that broader sequence of federal interventions in the South that were based on perceptions of the current state of a landscape, and what it could become. While advocates of Clarks Hill did not always point to the TVA as their inspiration, that agency’s work in the Tennessee valley helped set the stage for damming the Savannah. Just as the TVA would build a system of dams, those pushing for Clarks Hill Dam envisioned it as the first of a chain. Indeed, the federal legislation that approved Clarks Hill in 1944 included a general plan for eleven Corps dams on the upper Savannah and its largest tributaries, although only Clarks Hill and two others eventually were constructed.¹⁶

The displacement of people from their immediate communities was a significant element in the histories of the large-scale federal interventions in the Smoky Mountains and the valley of the Tennessee River. For example, when the TVA built Norris Dam on the Clinch River

¹⁵ Acquisition file for Tract G-678, Mrs. Grace F. Hearn et al., on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam.

¹⁶ Clarks Hill Authority of South Carolina, “Truth about the Clarks Hill Project,” filed in the Edgar A. Brown Papers, MSS 91, folder 203, box 15, Special Collections, Clemson University; Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 420-21, list the other dam sites as Hartwell, Goat Island, and Middleton Shoals on the Savannah, Camp Creek, Rogues Ford, Sand Bottom, and War Woman on the Chattooga, Tallow Hill and Anthony Shoals on the Broad, and possibly Newry-Old Pickens on the upper Seneca.

between 1933 and 1936, the fledgling New Deal agency acquired the homes of about 3,500 families and required them to move off the land. Norris was the TVA's first dam, and the hydropower project displaced more people than any subsequent TVA dams.¹⁷

Most of the residents of the 153,000 acres the TVA acquired for Norris were farmers and their tenants, scraping a subsistence from rocky, sloping land within the mountainous terrain of the upper Tennessee River and its tributaries, according to authors Michael McDonald and John Muldowny. For many, the project meant “a disastrous wrenching away from familiar surroundings and a disruption of a sense of community” that families had built up over many generations, the authors contend in *TVA and the Dispossessed*. They describe many of the displaced people as torn between support for the TVA's development aims in a largely impoverished region, and fear or anger over the drastic disruption of community ties. The TVA found they had lived in their communities for thirty-five years on average, and on the same farms for twenty-three years. Even in their isolated lives, depicted by the authors as seemingly stalled between premodern and modern conditions, those residents did not turn their backs easily on the land and human networks to which they were closely tied.¹⁸

Some sold their land without much delay and were happy to get the money, considering they were suffering through the Depression, according to McDonald and Muldowny. Others believed their land was worth a lot more than the government offered, and they held out for a better price during condemnation proceedings. A handful of families stayed put until the last possible moment, leading authorities to evict them as the water of the Clinch started rising

¹⁷ Michael McDonald and John Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 4.

¹⁸ McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 70, 90-110, and 195.

behind the dam. The authors conducted several oral history interviews in 1976, and one man, former resident H. Clay Stiner, said it had seemed “just like a funeral” every day at his country store, as displaced residents moved out with their belongings through the crossroads that his store occupied.¹⁹

McDonald and Muldowny contend that, even with the important connections between people and place in the Norris basin, the federal government was justified in pursuing major changes there. It was obvious, they state, that the area “stood in need of restoration and some beneficent change” to break the pattern of declining soil and poverty. But the authors conclude the TVA failed to put enough thought and resources into the regional planning that President Franklin Roosevelt had envisioned for the agency, and that would have generated real improvements in the lives of the dislocated people so their sacrifices would have been worthwhile.²⁰

No signs of people organizing at a significant level to try to prevent the Norris project arise in *TVA and the Dispossessed*. Those who objected to the government’s actions showed their displeasure in indirect, individualized ways, similar to the expressions of people impacted by Clarks Hill. In both cases, a massive new reservoir presented a threat to the integrity of the local community that reminded people of the importance of their bonds to the land and community, but also brought out their tendency to deal with challenges as individuals or families, rather than as a community.

Scholars Margaret Brown and Durwood Dunn both deal with the displacement of landowners and residents during creation of the Smoky Mountains National Park. Dunn

¹⁹ Ibid., 38 and 60-62.

²⁰ Ibid., 268.

focuses primarily on one Tennessee community in *Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachian Community, 1818-1937*, while Brown paints a broader portrait in *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains*. For the park, the states of Tennessee and North Carolina carried out much of the land acquisition on behalf of the federal government. Over twelve years, the state governments bought some 1,132 small farms and eighteen larger tracts, requiring about 5,600 people to leave their homes.²¹ Both Brown and Dunn argue that, along with the potential benefits of the park that many of the people acknowledged, there were undeniable human costs.

Dunn in particular develops a detailed view of the culture of a community and its residents' longstanding ties to one another and the land. Dunn writes that, while some in Cades Cove sold their land willingly, most faced with displacement with "dread and apprehension." The residents of the cove had a hard time expressing to "outsiders" what the place meant to them. In Dunn's portrayal, the rough and declining conditions of life that such outsiders saw obscured the fact that residents identified with the cove as home at the deepest levels – a place they loved in spite of the harsher aspects of their lives. They expressed and renewed their strong connections to the land in part by attaching a name to virtually every creek, field, hilltop, spring, and noteworthy tree, Dunn contends. Their knowledge of the land was a critical thread in their sense of community.²²

Both Dunn and Brown tell the story of John Oliver, a prominent resident of Cades Cove who waged a legal challenge to land condemnations for the park, providing inspiration for

²¹ Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 98.

²² Durwood Dunn, *Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachian Community, 1818-1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 20, and 247-48.

residents while he fought and evoking resignation when he lost his central case. Oliver, great-grandson of the first white settler in the cove, filed multiple suits over the condemnation of his farm in 1929 because he wanted to represent a community “paralyzed by confusion and fear,” according to Dunn. He based his key suit on questioning the power of the state of Tennessee to condemn land as a stand-in for the federal government.²³

Oliver won an initial victory at the county level, but later the Tennessee Supreme Court ruled against him in a closely watched decision, although he was able to get a higher payment for his land through other cases. Brown contends that when Oliver, and a similarly well-known man in North Carolina named Mack Hannah, lost their cases, it discouraged others from waging a similar fight, partly because they could see the “immense power” of the federal government. Residents figured that, if these leading citizens could not prevail, then what chance would they have? In Cades Cove, Dunn says another factor was that residents also were “lulled into a false sense of security” by assurances from park promoters and top state officials that the cove would not be included in the park. Dunn suggests the residents therefore missed a chance to lobby early in the process for the cove to be excluded from the park boundaries, as residents in an adjacent county had done successfully.²⁴

These histories from Tennessee and North Carolina reveal similar reactions to those of people affected by Clarks Hill. The community as a whole had mixed feelings, and so did individual people. For some who did not put up a fight, it was partly a matter of seeing no hope of gain, rather than being completely at peace with the loss of their land.

²³ Dunn, *Cades Cove*, 249-50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 243-46; and Brown, *Wild East*, 97.

In *The Wild East*, Brown also writes about the TVA's Fontana Dam, completed in western North Carolina in 1944, the year Clarks Hill was approved. That project displaced about 1,300 families, including Henry and Alice Posey, who delayed their move so long they had to leave behind their last load of possessions. Henry Posey said that disruption and concern over the world war put a damper on possible resistance to Fontana, which had a more explicit connection to the war effort in that the government said the dam's hydropower would aid the manufacturing of aluminum. "If there hadn't been a war going on, there would've been a war up [in the dam basin]," he claimed.²⁵

The TVA was hatched with a broad range of interconnected social, environmental and economic goals, from generating cheaper power to conserving soil and forest lands within the Tennessee valley. The advocates of Clarks Hill also tended to invest their project with a wide variety of potential benefits, even if the official purposes of the Corps in the project were more narrowly defined. In pursuit of their goals, both the TVA, and the Corps at Clarks Hill, acquired more land than they later would deem necessary. With Norris Dam, the TVA declared about 70,000 acres as "surplus" in the 1940s and 50s, out of the total of 153,000 acres it initially purchased.²⁶ The Corps likewise would designate thousands of acres of its property at Clarks Hill as surplus to be sold several years after the dam's completion, sparking resentment among some who had been impacted by the land acquisitions, only to see the Corps decide it did not need all of that land after all.

Two of the most prominent and persistent advocates for damming the Savannah were Thomas Hamilton, editor of the *Augusta Chronicle* in the 1920s and 30s, and Lester Moody,

²⁵ Brown, *Wild East*, 164-65.

²⁶ McDonald and Muldowny, 135-36.

the influential secretary of the chamber of commerce in Augusta in that era. Hamilton's voice was amplified because he had the newspaper as his forum. Moody also had occasion to air his views publicly, but his usual role was behind the scenes, building connections with local and state officials and crafting strategies to convince federal leaders to approve Clarks Hill.

Hamilton took over the *Chronicle* and Moody started work for the Augusta chamber in the mid-1920s, in a time of growing influence in the South of the "business progressivism" that James Cobb describes in *The Selling of the South*. Cobb focuses on the "crusade" by southerners for industrial development between 1936 and 1990. But he portrays the business progressivism of the 1920s as a foundation for that crusade. The people so labeled were progressives because they called on the government to do more to improve citizens' lives, and business progressives because they saw the promotion of economic development as a primary part of that role.²⁷

Augustans like Moody and Hamilton fit the business-progressive mold to the degree that they tied the damming of the Savannah to economic development, and they came to see federal funds as critical to transforming the river as they hoped. Of course, as the New Deal expanded the role of the federal government in many ways during the 1930s, conservative southern business people and politicians had an increasingly conflicted view of that role. As Cobb puts it, they "stretched their tolerance for 'big government' to the limit" because of their eagerness for federal money.²⁸ When they carried on the push for more federal intervention on the Savannah River into the 1940s, southern Democrats like Thurmond and

²⁷ James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 3-4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

prominent South Carolina state senator Edgar A. Brown, and national players such as Richard B. Russell of Georgia and James F. Brynes and Burnet Maybank of South Carolina, walked a fine line on the terrain of their beliefs and interests.²⁹

But in one sense, projects like Clarks Hill seemed relatively safe to them. The dam did not directly threaten segregation of blacks and whites in social arenas like the schools, nor did it challenge white supremacy in economic and political matters. Clarks Hill advocates could compartmentalize – perceive and tout benefits from the dam, removed from concerns about federal involvement in other areas. Those concerns were escalating in 1944, the year the project first was approved. In April, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* that the all-white primary, a lynchpin in the political dominance of white Democrats in the South, was unconstitutional. During the Democratic National Convention in July, a southern/northern rift in that party widened, largely over issues tied to race, to the point that several southern delegations “verged on open revolt,” according to historian Patricia Sullivan, who calls the convention the “opening round of the postwar struggle to determine the future of New Deal liberalism and its role in defining the Democratic Party.”³⁰

Still, even with growing southern ambivalence, the federal government already had a considerable presence and influence on the land in this part of Georgia and South Carolina by the time of Clarks Hill Dam. About twenty miles to the south on the outskirts of Augusta, the War Department established Fort Gordon in 1941, and steadily acquired 56,000 acres for that installation, resorting to condemnation in a number of cases. On the South Carolina side of

²⁹ U.S. senators Russell and Maybank argued at length for Clarks Hill during congressional debate over the 1944 Flood Control bill, 78th Cong., 2d sess., *Congressional Record* 90, pt. 7: 9245-9246.

³⁰ Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 7-8 and 147-48.

the river, the government turned some 120,000 acres into the Long Cane district of Sumter National Forest in 1936.³¹

And in 1950, while Clarks Hill was in the midst of construction, the process of federalizing a portion of the Savannah valley landscape continued on an even larger scale. The Atomic Energy Commission and private contractor DuPont announced plans that fall to build a facility near the river for producing hydrogen-bomb materials at the Savannah River Site. The federal government acquired some 250,000 acres in Aiken, S.C., and surrounding counties, about fifteen miles south of Augusta in the lower Savannah valley. It required about 1,500 families to move, including the entire communities of Ellenton and Dunbarton.³²

Back in April 1936, the Savannah was building toward flood stage due to spring rains and thawing in the highlands. The *Chronicle's* Hamilton urged readers to ponder the river running high in its course through the city, and how it might be manipulated to their advantage. He offered a conflicting set of judgments, calling the river in part a “magnificent stream that is now flowing majestically past us in huge volume,” and arguing that it represented the Augusta area’s greatest asset and key to its future. He also cast the river as the city’s greatest threat when it rose and swept through its watershed with an accumulated

³¹ Civil docket for U.S. District Court, Augusta, July 23, 1942-April 17, 1947, NRC 00-03 #8, Vol. 6, Federal Archives, Morrow, GA.

³² Kari Frederickson, “Confronting the Garrison State: South Carolina in the Early Cold War Era,” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. LXXII No. 2, May 2006, 349-52 and 373-74; the possibility of a nuclear facility in the lower Savannah valley was not on the horizon when Congress approved Clarks Hill, so the Savannah River Site was not part of the argument for that dam. But the plans for Clarks Hill and Hartwell dams on the upper Savannah did make the Aiken County site more attractive for the nuclear facility, since the dams made the river flow on the lower Savannah more predictable.

violence. The thing to do was “to conquer that great stream” and direct its strength to human needs, in Hamilton’s view.³³

The notion of exactly how the river’s strength could be more useful to people would evolve and expand in the coming years. But a central, consistent argument was that hydropower would attract new industries to the Savannah valley, in combination with other qualities the area possessed. Hamilton promoted that idea frequently in the 1930s, and people like Strom Thurmond followed the same thread in the 1940s.

South Carolina and Georgia needed new industries to balance their economies, which had relied primarily on agriculture for too long, Thurmond said in 1947, as South Carolina’s new governor. The prospect of cheap power was critical in drawing in more manufacturers, he contended, along with factors such as “freedom from strikes.” A pro-Clarks Hill bulletin published in the late 1940s claimed that developing the Savannah would benefit not just the valley but all the South Atlantic states, by adding hydropower and water reserves to a region that already was “blessed with raw materials and labor.”³⁴ In sum, the dam advocates touted the same attributes that figured so prominently in boosterism across the South – the availability of low-wage workers and raw materials, and the relative weakness of unions – and sought to add a well-developed river to the mix.

The Augusta chamber’s Lester Moody continued the push for river development beyond Clarks Hill, but he was making the same point in 1959 that he had over the previous three decades. The dam building should proceed on the Savannah was engineered for human

³³ “The Lesson of the High River,” *Augusta Chronicle*, April 8, 1936.

³⁴ Thurmond remarks in *Augusta Herald*, Feb. 7, 1947; benefits to South Atlantic region in Clarks Hill Authority, “Truth about the Clarks Hill Project,” Edgar A. Brown Papers, Clemson.

purposes to the fullest, which meant “using every drop of it,” according to Moody. At that time, he was lobbying for one or two more dams between Clarks Hill and the Hartwell Dam, under construction by the Corps upriver. Although the execution was complex and expensive, the guiding idea was simple for advocates like Moody, who opined, “Water is a wonderful thing if it’s properly used, and an enemy if it’s not.”³⁵

Along the Savannah River, people like Milledge Reid and his sisters Martha, Sallie and Frances were in the way of a greater good, as the supporters of Clarks Hill saw it. However, they did not want to move, and they resisted leaving their land longer than most. The Reids showed a powerful attachment to their land as a source of bodily sustenance, a storehouse of family memories, and a major piece of their identity. They held out hope that the rising water would not reach them, or that the Corps would change its mind and let them stay.

Their actions were a small part of the larger story of how people responded to the government’s acquisition of land for the dam and the long, narrow lake that had 1,200 miles of shoreline once full.³⁶ Some of the land taken was occupied before the Corps acquired it, and some was not. Reactions ranged from seemingly uncomplicated acceptance, to at least temporary denial and the filing of lawsuits.

The breaking of that connection was a cost for the Reids, but for the Corps, it was not the kind of cost that appeared in an early assessment of the land for the reservoir and what the federal government might have to spend to acquire it. The agency’s real-estate office in Atlanta was in charge of analyzing the land, and staff members J.S. Durant and B.H. Grant reported their findings in October 1942. The size of the lake still was an open question at that

³⁵ *Augusta Chronicle*, Oct. 29, 1959.

³⁶ Sparks, “Georgia’s New Ocean.”

time, and in the maximum proposed area, they identified some 521 distinct landowners, which included individual people and estates, as well as a couple of private schools, three private electric utilities – which also had designs on building a hydropower dam on the Savannah – and other private entities.

Durant and Grant wrote that virtually the entire area was in “extremely poor” condition for agriculture, due to soil erosion. They acknowledged that river bottomland, with relatively rich soil, was an exception to their statement about depleted farmland. But the authors contended the bottomland acreage was minimal. They added that, except for a section of excellent timber on the South Carolina side, all the wooded areas within the potential basin were “completely cutover,” so that the remaining pines were good only for pulpwood, not saw timber. Their take was that the land had been heavily used for a long time, to the great detriment of its value.³⁷

The Corps staff described a limited human presence on the targeted land. In the area of nearly 87,000 acres in Georgia and South Carolina that would have been inundated by the reservoir at its greatest proposed size, Durant and Grant stated that, “except for a very small percentage, probably not exceeding 5% open and adaptable to cultivation, the maximum area is sparcely [*sic*] tenant occupied, mostly colored, and restricted to not more than 50 families.” Those were their words. It is more difficult to know the men’s implication, but it seemed to be that relatively few people lived there, and most were not a meaningful obstacle because

³⁷ Corps of Engineers, “Real Estate Planning Report for Clark Hill Reservoir,” October 1942 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

they were tenants, and because they were black. Moving those people off the land figured to be “no problem of consequence,” Durant and Grant concluded.³⁸

Their judgments were accurate in certain respects. Farming had eroded the soil in the upper Savannah valley as in similar piedmont regions throughout the South, and owners of the pine and hardwood stands had harvested the timber over several generations. The region-wide trends of migration to southern towns and cities and to the North, boll-weevil infestation, and the related declines in agriculture all applied to the valley.

The farming and other human activity had faded on land like the 391-acre tract in Lincoln County owned by the Haynes family. The only thing missing from the portrait of decline that the federal appraiser crafted for the tract were tumbleweeds – or more appropriately, a creeping blanket of kudzu. No one lived in the two houses, including the main house that was unpainted and had no plumbing or lights, and the collapsing tenant house. The appraiser suggested the Corps pay just \$50 for the main house and nothing for the former tenant dwelling. The corn crib and smokehouse were decaying, the soil was thin, and pines were taking over the “idle and abandoned” fields. The appraiser described the area as sparsely settled by blacks and whites, and judged the total value of the tract at \$6,600.³⁹

The Corps was correct to anticipate “no problem of consequence” in clearing the land of inhabitants, at least from its own perspective, since it had clear legal authority to do it and the financial strength to handle any court challenges that cash-strapped rural residents might mount. Although it is not apparent what would have qualified as a truly consequential

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Acquisition file for Tract G-652 A and B, Mrs. E.H. Haynes, Box 8 of 45 for Segments F and G (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

problem for the Corps, none arose that threatened to stop the agency eventually from acquiring the land it decided was needed.

The agency was still finalizing its acquisition of land even as construction on the dam proceeded and the lake began to form. Many people accepted the agency's authority to acquire their land and/or require them to move more or less without questioning the actions of the government. Some residents no doubt grumbled to varying degrees and expressed their contempt for the federal government to their family and neighbors, but others likely were somewhat relieved or even pleased to find a buyer for their fields and to leave farming behind, or to get a little money for property they had ceased to farm on a significant scale.

The family of Phinzy Davis was required to sell a sizeable chunk of land on the Georgia side. Davis, who grew up in Augusta, worked in 2008 for the Corps as manager of the power plant at the base of the dam, where the water is forced through turbines to generate electricity. His impression, from conversations in his own family and with residents of the area over the years, was that people affected by the reservoir were divided evenly into two camps. "There were a lot of people, I think, that were happy to get away from it," Davis said. "That's why this project has so much land, because they had somebody who would buy it. There were some people, on the other hand, who didn't want to sell and were pretty much forced to. It was probably a split."⁴⁰

One should weigh the value of the description by Davis with the fact in mind that, as power plant manager, he has earned his livelihood directly from the Clarks Hill project. Perhaps he overstated the prevalence of people eager to sell to the Corps and their happiness

⁴⁰ Phinzy Davis, telephone interview by author, Nov. 21, 2007.

over the prospect. But leaving aside an effort to gauge exactly how many landowners and residents were pleased and how many were bitter, it is clear that some saw a welcome opportunity and others a grievous wrong.

At the same time, the real-estate report does not add up in other ways. The appraisals of individual tracts that the federal government did in the late 1940s showed both white and black residents in some areas where land was acquired. The reality appeared much more varied than in the 1942 report, in terms of the occupancy of the land, as well as the state of agriculture. For example, R.B. Williams owned about thirty acres east of Lincolnton that consisted of idle farm fields, pasture, and woodlands. According to the appraiser, “The area is not considered a very good farming area. The neighborhood is sparsely [*sic*] settled, mostly negroes.” But also outside of Lincolnton, A.M. Davis owned thirty-seven acres, and he lived there in a house that had five rooms and electric lights and was in fair condition, in an area that was “mixed white and black,” in the appraiser’s judgment.⁴¹ Albert S. Sims owned eleven acres south of town in a neighborhood the appraiser described as “fairly well developed agriculturally with a good sprinkling of resident white owners of medium sized general farms.”⁴² Wayne Goolsby had 270 acres on Leverette-Maxim Road that the Corps acquired, located in a “mixed Negro and white neighborhood.”⁴³

Most of those who appear in this thesis, such as the Reids, the Fortsons, Holloways, F.M. Parton, R.E. Edmunds, Annie Robinson and the neighbor of Bobby Edmonds in McCormick, S.C., all mentioned as being impacted by the Corps’ acquisition of land, were white. That

⁴¹ Acquisition file for Tract G-648, A.M. Davis (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

⁴² Acquisition file for Tract G-658, Albert S. Sims (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

⁴³ Acquisition file for Tract G-644, Wayne Goolsby (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

fact does not reconcile neatly with the depiction in the 1942 report. This thesis does not suggest that, since many of the displaced people or landowners were white, they deserved more consideration. The point is that the 1942 assessment, which became part of the mountain of information Congress had before it in considering Clarks Hill for approval, gave an incomplete view. The estimate of no more than fifty families also seems low.⁴⁴ The report painted the scene with a broad brush, suggesting the government did not want or need to look all that closely at the place it meant to transform.

Consider the fact that, at mid-century, black residents made up the majority in two of the primary lake counties, Lincoln and McCormick. In 1950, Lincoln had about 3,300 blacks and 3,200 whites, while McCormick had 6,500 blacks and 3,000 whites.⁴⁵ Perhaps the real-estate staff members relied on such data when they talked in 1942 about a “mostly colored” population in the path of the reservoir, rather than on a careful assessment of the on-the-ground reality. At the same time, they missed or ignored another possible implication of the same data – that it would have been difficult for blacks and whites to inhabit completely separate landscapes within such counties; they would have been somewhat intermingled in where they lived, even with Jim Crow strictures on how they interacted at the social level.

Memories do not match fully with statements from the Corps that most of the land was degraded beyond much use, and in the records, a difference recurs regularly between how

⁴⁴ The figure of fifty families in the 1942 report was for the area to be flooded. That estimate, therefore, does not apply to the additional 70,000 acres or so that the Corps ended up acquiring beyond the water line. Nevertheless, the author contends that more people were living in the overall area of acquisition than the Corps suggested before the dam project was approved. In looking at just a small portion of the overall area, the author identified thirteen individuals or families that were required to move, both owners and tenants. The author has not yet found a solid, post-construction estimate for the number of displaced people.

⁴⁵ Corps of Engineers, “Master Plan for Development and Management Clark Hill Reservoir,” 26.

Corps representatives described the value of targeted land and how the owners and their neighbors gauged the value. The tendency to downplay the value and human occupancy of the land was reflected in contemporary media reports as well. A writer in 1947 stated that the lake would flood more than 70,000 acres of “swamp and river bottom,” but did not mention that residents would be displaced. Another journalist reported in 1951 that “very little farm land is included in [the basin] and only a small percentage of the land was used previously for other than timber and pulpwood production.”⁴⁶ Learning a small portion of people’s stories through interviews and the written record gives a more complete picture of the land and people before the dam changed their lives forever.

Looking to the future, if severe droughts continue to prompt local and state governments in the South to ponder building new reservoirs, bringing to light the experiences of people like those affected by Clarks Hill should enrich the discussion. In Georgia, for example, the General Assembly created a new state agency in 2008 with the sole aim of building new reservoirs and expanding existing ones to boost water supplies in the state.⁴⁷ The Flint River in central Georgia is one of a number of waterways that could be a focus of debate. The Corps of Engineers had proposed a series of three dams on the Flint in the 1960s, just as the Corps was finishing work on Hartwell Dam on the Savannah. Opposition mounted to the Flint dams and the proposal faded in the 1970s. But Georgia congressmen pursued federal money in 2008 for studying dams on the Flint anew, with an eye on expanding Atlanta’s water supply. Similarly, officials worried about future water supplies in the Western states

⁴⁶ *Public Works News*, May 22, 1947; and Mary Carter Winter, “Scheduled completion of Clark Hill dam only 3 months away,” *Augusta Chronicle*, Oct. 28, 1951.

⁴⁷ Stacy Shelton, “Water advocate calls Legislature ‘a giant missed opportunity,’” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 7, 2008.

have pushed for consideration of new dams – a reaction, in part, to the tremendous population growth in the West that the big dams of earlier decades had made possible.⁴⁸

In the debate that is likely to ensue about the greater good of new dam and reservoir projects, the history of those who were displaced by previous projects can give a fuller, humanized view of the costs. Proponents must give clear-eyed consideration to the question of who pays a price in such a reordering of the landscape, and also take stock of whether the actual benefits of previous projects have merited the price.

⁴⁸ S. Heather Duncan, “Flint River dam proposals revive statewide controversy,” *Macon Telegraph*, Dec. 1, 2008; and Nicholas K. Geranios, “West looking again at building new dams,” Associated Press, found at <http://news.yahoo.com/> and accessed March 2, 2008.

CHAPTER ONE:

Origins – The River as a Missed Opportunity

As individuals and communities, Americans have asked a great deal of the rivers flowing through the nation. We have looked to rivers for sustenance in drinking water, fish and other wildlife, for personal and commercial-scale transportation, irrigation, and useful power. As expressed in both the real and imagined lives of Americans – in history and art – we have sought insight, wealth, peace, salvation, adventure and wildness down by the riverside and on the currents, and dreamed the waters might carry us away from our problems, or carry problems such as wastewater away from us. Rivers and their banks have been places for holy acts and sinful, sometimes murderous deeds. Americans have seen rivers as political boundaries, corridors connecting disparate places and people, and thresholds to cross in leaving one life behind and entering a new one. We also have experienced rivers as threats to health and home, on a personal scale in spots where the waters form rapids or plunge over cliffs, and communally when the waters swell into major floods.

To the proponents of Clarks Hill Dam, the Savannah River was a missed opportunity. In their view, beyond what natural beauty or value in its unfettered state the river might have possessed, it had something more to contribute to the needs of people in the valley, in particular the power to turn machinery and, with proper engineering to ensure sufficient flow throughout the year, to float a greater volume of goods down to the port at Savannah. To dam advocates, this potential was wasted so long as the Savannah flowed on the timetable and course of its own choosing, forming from tributaries in the highlands, and draining the

piedmont and coastal plain to empty into the Atlantic. The river was a raw material, and man had neglected to fully develop it up to that point.

Along with representing an untapped resource, the Savannah also was perceived as a periodic threat to the riverside city of Augusta. It was a Jekyll and Hyde image: The river usually was a sedate, appealing part of the backdrop as it passed through the city, but on occasion was transformed into an unrestrained, frightening, and harmful force. The Savannah indeed had risen out of its banks and flooded the city's streets a number of times over the previous two centuries, and the impulse to reign in such floodwaters was an important thread in the arguments that proponents made for Clarks Hill, even if analysis by the Corps of Engineers suggested that Augusta actually was well-protected by the time Clarks Hill was approved. The project therefore had its origins partly in the characteristics of the river itself, such as its flow rate, volume, path, seasonal fluctuations, and the force within water gathering and flowing downhill that could be both destructive and beneficial to human purposes. The origins also lay in the perceptions of the river and valley and the desires of the people who pushed for the dam and ultimately brought it to fruition.

In one sense, one could rightly see Clarks Hill Dam as an easy sell, considering the context in which it was authorized in 1944. By that year, several of the big dams were in place in the American West, sparking the imaginations of Americans with their scale and promise. Within the South, the massive engineering of the Tennessee River system by the TVA had been underway for more than ten years – setting precedents for big dam projects and providing important models. Private power companies had constructed a number of hydropower dams in the South as well. In a broader sense, the federal government had gained

a much more prominent place in the southern states during the New Deal and then the mobilization for World War Two, and in terms of rivers specifically, President Franklin Roosevelt had a clear track record of supporting multi-purpose dam projects within plans for developing river basins in a comprehensive way.

For Roosevelt, it was all the better if the basin was in the South, the region he had long fretted over and sought to reshape. Roosevelt said in 1938 that he was concerned about the South not only because of his personal affection for its people and land, but because its health was vital to the nation as a whole. He famously described the South as the country's "No. 1 economic problem – the nation's problem, not merely the South's." His comment was included in the *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* that the National Emergency Council crafted in 1938 at Roosevelt's request, largely a political document meant to highlight the economic and social problems of the region, and to kick-start the reforms Roosevelt hoped to pursue. "The paradox of the South is that while it is blessed by Nature with immense wealth, its people as a whole are the poorest in the country," the report stated, pointing to rivers as elements of that natural wealth that still were fully utilized.⁴⁹

On the other hand, Clarks Hill Dam was a long time in the making. One could say it was an idea for at least fifty years before it became a reality. The Corps of Engineers had noted the potential benefits of building a dam or dams on the upper Savannah north of Augusta as early as 1889, although the Corps at that time was making a tangential, informal comment on flood control possibilities, rather than hydropower.⁵⁰ A private utility company made a major

⁴⁹ National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938), 1-2 and 8; and Schulman, *Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, viii-ix, 8, 37-38.

⁵⁰ Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 125.

splash in the 1920s with plans for a hydropower dam in the vicinity of Clarks Hill, but the company put an indefinite hold on those plans when the Great Depression swept over the country. South Carolina and Georgia officials and President Roosevelt were exploring a public dam project there by the mid-thirties, but it was another decade before Congress authorized Clarks Hill.

Even that step was more a beginning than a culmination, as the same private utility that had designs on a dam in the twenties decided to challenge the government's plans for a public project, saying that times had changed and it wanted to pursue the project after all. The political and business elites in the two states who wanted the government to build the project still were waging that fight and making a case for Clarks Hill in 1948. The vehemence of their arguments attests to the significant level of doubt that remained about the project's fate even at that stage.

People had been tinkering with the Savannah River for a long time before they started damming it in the late 1940s. Efforts to make the river more suitable for human purposes increased in scale and scope over time, and Clarks Hill was a step in that progression, connected to the engineering that both preceded and followed it. While Native Americans had used the river as a source of food, a route of travel, a place to live, and a point of orientation in moving across the land, it was European settlers and their descendents who pursued increasingly significant changes to the river over more than two centuries.

Making it easier for watercraft to ply the river was the early focus. Indeed, concerns about navigation had been central in the mind of James Oglethorpe when he and his group of English settlers landed in 1733 on the south bank of the Savannah, about ten miles inland

from the Atlantic Ocean. Oglethorpe chose to establish the colony of Georgia on a bluff there above the river, in large part because the shape and depth of the river in that spot gave it potential as a port for sea-going ships. Two years later, the English established Fort Augusta on the river some two hundred miles upstream from the fledgling city of Savannah, and as Augusta grew into an important trade center in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, navigation on the Savannah River between the two cities likewise grew in importance.⁵¹

The topography and underlying geology shaped the human history of the area. The river was appealing to the colonists who built Ft. Augusta because they wanted to use the waterway to move people and materials. That location in particular made sense because it was along the fall line – the demarcation between the piedmont to the north and coastal plain to the south, a trace of the line to which the sea had reached tens of millions of years in the past. Above the fall line was the upper Savannah, more narrow and with shoals and rapids, flowing over the harder, tougher-to-erode crystalline rocks; below the fall line, the river was somewhat more broad and slow as it moved through a landscape with softer sedimentary rock beneath it. Settlements like Augusta along the fall line were at the head of navigation, or the point where it became increasingly difficult for watercraft to continue upstream. By the 1800s, Augusta was like the spout of a funnel, into which tobacco and then cotton and other products and materials flowed for storage, and then flowed out for shipment downriver to Savannah. In the twentieth century, the fall line and the associated qualities of the upper river also would make it a good candidate for a hydropower dam.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., 7-11.

⁵² Ibid., 11-19; also see Mack S. Duncan, "Fall Line," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-721> (accessed April 13, 2009); also University of

The stretch of river between Augusta and Savannah, and particularly near the port at Savannah, drew the majority of attention from the Corps in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Crews waged a seemingly constant battle to alter the river's flow in spots and keep it reliably passable for boats. They dredged sand and gravel, extracted logs or "snags" that bobbed on the surface or just below it, built jetties, extended spur dams and training walls into the current, and erected dikes, trying with only partial success to control the course of the water so that it would not dump sediment and create new sandbars in the shipping channel. To a degree, the river was predictable and manageable, but never completely controllable. It was a force that, if redirected in one area, soon expended some of its power elsewhere in undercutting banks and building up shoals.⁵³

While the lower river was the focus, public and private interests did not completely ignore navigation improvements on the upper river, north of Augusta. Much of the cotton, timber and other materials were transported to Augusta overland by wagon for shipment on to Savannah, but a portion of these materials was floated down the river to Augusta well into the nineteenth century, even in the early decades of railroad expansion. The city was the "pulsing, vivid capital of this new cotton empire, one that radiated from it on all side into Georgia and South Carolina," as writer Thomas Stokes put it.⁵⁴ In 1827, for example, pole boats and wagons transported more than 100,000 bales of cotton to Augusta.⁵⁵ The town of

Georgia Department of Geology, "The Fall Line," <http://www.gly.uga.edu/default.php?PK=0&iPage=5#FallLine> (accessed April 13, 2009); and Bartlett, *Rolling Rivers*, 82-85.

⁵³ Barber and Gann, 87-109.

⁵⁴ Thomas L. Stokes, *The Savannah* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951), 219.

⁵⁵ Earl L. Bell and Kenneth C. Crabbe, *The Augusta Chronicle: Indomitable Voice of Dixie, 1785-1960* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960), 35-36.

Petersburg, Ga., had grown up about fifty-three miles north of Augusta, at the Broad River where it flowed into the Savannah. And there was enough demand for moving materials by water to Augusta that commerce-minded inhabitants earlier had chartered the Savannah Navigation Co. to start the work of removing log snags and sand bars that presented a problem for boats plying the river between Petersburg and Augusta.⁵⁶

That company's efforts were a precursor, on a small scale, to work that the federal government would undertake toward the end of the nineteenth century to enhance river navigation north of Augusta. In 1878, Congress directed the Corps to survey the river from Augusta all the way up to the Tugaloo River to get a sense of navigation impediments. Two years later, Congress authorized the agency to proceed with creating a consistent channel in the river for the sixty-four miles between Augusta and Trotters Shoals, and to pluck all the snags from the river even further north, up to the Tugaloo.⁵⁷ As on the lower Savannah, the Corps made progress on excavating sand and rock for the channel and clearing snags over the next decade or so, but just like the lower Savannah, the upper river had its way of undoing the work and reclaiming a portion of its earlier shape. The focus and goals of the Corps also meandered and took new shape toward the end of the 1800s and into the new century.

⁵⁶ Bell and Crabbe, *The Augusta Chronicle*, 24; and Stokes, *The Savannah*, 195-96.

⁵⁷ Barber and Gann, 121-23.

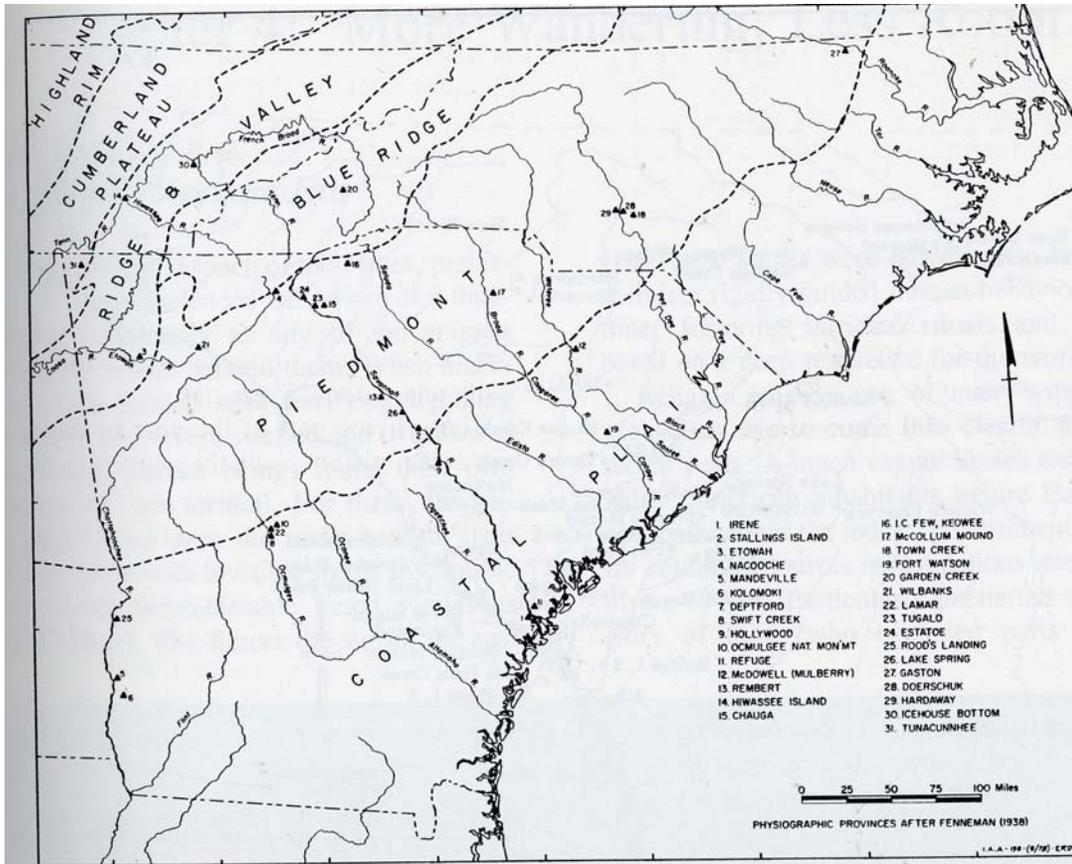


Figure 2: Map of the “Fall Line” (southernmost dotted line) dividing the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. Sharyn Kane and Richard Keeton, *Beneath These Waters* (Atlanta: Corps of Engineers, 1993).

Navigation improvements along the river figure in the origins of Clarks Hill Dam because they were a chance for the Corps to further stake out the Savannah as a part of its turf. The agency accumulated a measure of institutional knowledge about the nature of the river over decades of trying to manipulate its flow, and it established that the Savannah held enough potential benefit to man that it was a legitimate arena for the use of engineering manpower and resources. This tradition of work on the river was one reason the Corps

ultimately was the organization that built Clarks Hill – an outcome that was not always certain during debate over the project.

It was a gradual process for the agency to move beyond working solely on navigation improvements on the Savannah, to be in the position of constructing a large project with multiple purposes like Clarks Hill Dam. An early step came in 1888, when Congress included a provision in the Rivers and Harbors Act for the Corps to look in detail into how it might protect the city of Augusta from periodic floods. Floods that year and in 1887 had helped prompt the inquiry, and the agency also analyzed river flows in the floods that had damaged Augusta in 1796, 1840, 1852, and 1865. District Engineer Oberlin Carter noted in the study that, since farming practices and deforestation in the watershed contributed to flooding, changing those practices and planting trees could help – in effect by holding more rainfall in the ground. More to the point of what the Corps might do, Carter considered steps such as deepening the river channel below Augusta to move floodwaters downstream more quickly. But he judged that the best approach would be to dam some of the tributaries of the upper Savannah and create reservoirs to store floodwaters.⁵⁸

The Corps had serious doubts about getting directly into the business of controlling floods, and Congress did not seem eager to push it in that direction, at least around the turn of the century. On the Savannah, Oberlin's assessment of how best to keep the city of Augusta dry remained a conceptual study rather than a plan of action. Augusta experienced another flood in 1908, and while the Corps did some work to shore up riverbanks in the city where the swollen river had eroded them, the burden for flood-control measures remained on the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 124-25.

city. Not eager to see people paddling around downtown streets in boats, Augusta officials funded a levee that took several years to complete. A couple of decades later, when interest was rising in damming the river north of Augusta partly to control floods, the Corps would point to the city's levee as one of the reasons the Corps really did not need to ramp up its involvement in flood control on the Savannah.⁵⁹

But nationally, as the twentieth century unfolded, the current was moving in favor of a role for the Corps in river engineering beyond navigation works. The Flood Control Act of 1917, passed after increasingly damaging floods on the Mississippi River, was one of the milestones, giving the Corps greater flood-control duties on that river. Federal lawmakers suggested that an even broader expansion of the Corps' role was in the works in 1925, when they asked the agency to figure out how much it would cost to survey a number of rivers around the country. The surveys were to include potential navigation projects, but Congress also called for information on how the Corps might develop projects for flood control, hydropower and irrigation on those rivers. Two years later, Congress directed the Corps to go ahead with surveys of a list of rivers that included the Savannah, and the reports that the Corps submitted over the next few years became the starting point for multipurpose projects such as Clarks Hill.⁶⁰

In the Savannah River valley, public officials did not have a monopoly on the notion that the river could be put to work to a greater extent in service of human interests. The leaders of a private utility saw the potential as well. And the plans that the utility announced in the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 130-31.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 63-64.

1920s – and the way the plans were received – were a significant point in the history of Clarks Hill Dam.

The headline dominated the top of the *Augusta Chronicle*'s front page on Nov. 5, 1926: "Huge Power Plant to be Erected Near City." The Savannah River Electric Company (SREC) had applied the previous day to the Federal Power Commission for a license to build a hydropower dam on the river in the vicinity of Clarks Hill, and the private utility had an extremely friendly outlet in the *Chronicle* for announcing the news to the region. The lead story was a wire-service report, but the packaging and glowing editorial tone were the *Chronicle*'s choice. The newspaper gave the announcement prominent and highly positive play, employing the language of New South boosterism to describe the proposed dam and its broader impacts, as the paper's leaders envisioned them.⁶¹

The SREC, as a subsidiary of the Georgia Power Company, was not based in Augusta, and the dam was planned for a point about twenty-one miles north of town, in a different county. Nevertheless, the editor gave both Augusta and the newspaper a large measure of credit for the project, and predicted many of the benefits would accrue to the city. It was a project for Augusta and largely thanks to Augusta. The editor, Thomas Hamilton, proclaimed the news as nothing less than the "greatest moment in the history of Augusta," and the "hour of triumph for those who have steadfastly maintained that she is the city with the golden future." He celebrated with his readers, "You are a wonder city and there is no way to hold you back – you will now have the added impulse of men with millions who are going to

⁶¹ "Huge power plant to be erected near city," *Augusta Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1926.

develop one of your marvelous resources on a stupendous scale.”⁶² It was an interesting turn of phrase, his casting the river and its potential for generating power essentially as a natural resource that belonged to the city. By extension, his perspective would make the tens of thousands of acres to be flooded by the dam a resource of the city as well, but the *Chronicle*’s accounts did not mention the current owners and residents of that land even in general terms.

The SREC figured the dam at Clarks Hill was a \$20 million project that could be in place by 1930. It would build a concrete dam ninety feet high and 3,800 feet long, turn about 35,000 acres on both sides of the river into a reservoir, and ultimately generate a maximum of 120,000 horsepower of electricity. The company had crews drilling down to the bedrock at the dam site to make sure it was suitable. The utility meant to run new power lines from the dam as far as Charleston on the South Carolina side and Atlanta and Macon in Georgia, so it could serve “new industries in the growing towns and cities in the region,” according to the company – a marker of the migration of many southerners from farms to towns that would accelerate in the coming decades.⁶³

In his front-page editorial, Hamilton was unrestrained in his enthusiasm for the proposal, which he insisted would enable the Augusta area to “hum” with a diversified mix of new industry. He offered a vision of thousands of workmen spending millions of dollars in the area during the construction phase, and promised the start of a “great industrial epoch” once the dam was complete. New industries, finding the low power rates, rail and water

⁶² “Augusta, city with the golden future marches toward 250,000 goal by 1950; huge power project and what it means,” *Augusta Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1926; this column was signed only by “the Editor of the Chronicle,” but Thomas Hamilton was editor in 1926; see Bell and Crabbe, *The Augusta Chronicle*, 152-54.

⁶³ “City with golden future,” *Augusta Chronicle*.

transportation, and climate of Augusta irresistible, soon would turn the city into the leading distribution center of the Southeast and fuel a level of new development that would “stagger the imagination.” Hamilton acknowledged the dam was not the only piece of the puzzle. He said more work was needed to facilitate navigation on the Savannah below Augusta so it could handle a greater flow of commercial shipping.

But the dam and better navigation would prove to be the “keys to unlock a golden treasure chest” for the city and region. Finally, Hamilton praised the officials of the power company, singling out top executives such as Preston Arkwright, the president, and Harry Atkinson as “great builders of the South with many millions at their command.”⁶⁴ Hamilton’s column was meant to generate a bit of electricity of its own, and probably to get an early start on marginalizing any potential opposition.

A secondary article in the *Chronicle* ran without a byline, but considering the phrasing and the fact that it continued the unabashed praise and enumeration of benefits in Hamilton’s editorial, the likely author was Hamilton. “The general impression among those informed on the subject is that the stupendous project will be of far-reaching importance to Augusta and this section of Georgia and South Carolina,” he confided to readers, many of whom presumably were not among those so well-informed on the matter. He also said the project actually had been in the works for some twenty years.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ “City with golden future”; Arkwright also was president of Georgia Power, and both that company and the SREC were subsidiaries of Southeastern Power and Light, which in turn was part of Commonwealth and Southern; see transcript from hearing, Committee on Public Works, U.S. House of Reps., 80th Cong., 2nd Sess., March 1-3, 1948, in Edgar A. Brown Papers, Clemson.

⁶⁵ “Gigantic power plant project to be of vast importance locally,” *Augusta Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1926.

The piece included two other interesting elements, the first being that the newspaper's take was that the private utility actually intended to build several dams and reservoirs on the Savannah and its tributaries, mainly to ensure there would be enough water flowing in all seasons to the envisioned power plant at Clarks Hill. The editor argued that, along with other benefits, such projects would turn the upper river valley into "a great section of lakes and wonderfully watered country," and therefore a draw for tourism. The SREC did not mention plans for multiple dams in its announcement, so allowing the newspaper to mention that tidbit perhaps was a way to introduce the idea without putting out any official word. More importantly, it suggested people already had been thinking about ways to develop the river in a comprehensive way, an idea that would become increasingly central in the 1930s and 40s.

Secondly, the piece gave further insight into the thinking of Hamilton and the *Chronicle* on exactly how the private utility's plans might bring about such a wave of new industry. That thinking came across as more wishful than soundly reasoned, when Hamilton concluded that the Clarks Hill proposal meant that "industrial activity in Augusta and throughout this section, will be at its height during the period of [dam construction], and, of course, it naturally follows that manufacturing and industrial enterprises will spring up in the wake of the completion of the new development."⁶⁶ It was an obtuse, weakly worded conclusion. Why would a blooming of new industries be the obvious, natural consequence of commercial activity during the dam-building phase? The wording gave a sense of the potentially groundless claims that boosterism could contain.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Hamilton's words in the 1920s were noteworthy because he was an early and key advocate for Clarks Hill, in a position as editor to shape local opinion. His role in the project's origins was important enough that, when the dam actually was completed more than twenty-five years later, some thought the lake should be named for Hamilton, along with Lester Moody of the Augusta Chamber of Commerce, another relentless advocate. Congressman Paul Brown of nearby Elbert County, Ga., introduced a bill to that effect in Congress in the early 1950s, although it did not pass, likely because an undercurrent of interstate rivalry with South Carolina blocked the two Georgians from receiving the honor.⁶⁷

Hamilton was born in 1885 in Columbia County, a largely rural county just north of Augusta and Richmond County, bordered on the east by the Savannah River and the north by Little River. As a child, Hamilton had an affinity for playing in a creek near his home that drained into the Savannah, and for damming the creek to create a small swimming hole where his sisters, cousins, and neighborhood friends came to splash and cool off in summer. He and his father, William, and several farm hands would rebuild the mini-dam whenever heavy rains swept it away. Foregoing a life of farming in Columbia, Hamilton went off to college at Mercer University and then started working in journalism. By the early 1920s he was editor, part-owner, and president the *Chronicle*.⁶⁸

A history of the newspaper published in 1960 was consistently pro-*Chronicle* and given to boosterism – it seemed that civic leaders in Augusta were always working “tirelessly” or “unceasingly” or providing “wholehearted support” for some project for the good of the city

⁶⁷ Renaming idea in Edgar A. Brown to U.S. Senator Burnet Maybank of South Carolina, Jan. 21, 1954, letter in Edgar A. Brown papers, MSS 91, box 15, Clemson; also see Bell and Crabbe, *The Augusta Chronicle*, 156-60.

⁶⁸ Bell and Crabbe, 152-64; also see Lucy Hamilton Howard, “Childhood influences of Tom Hamilton played role in CSRA development,” *Augusta Chronicle*, June 22, 1952.

– but it also was well-researched. The authors gave Hamilton a significant portion of the credit for moving the Clarks Hill Dam forward, arguing that he had “a vision that made him, more than any other single individual, responsible for bringing Augusta’s dream of river control and development to near-realization.”⁶⁹

Hamilton helped create the Savannah River Improvement Commission to coordinate efforts of likeminded boosters, and he certainly had invested a lot of ink in the matter by the time of his death in 1937. As much as he would have liked to will it into existence, the hydropower dam as proposed by the SREC never came to fruition. The company received a federal license for the project in 1928 but allowed it to expire four years later during the Great Depression, without ever starting construction. Nevertheless, by the 1930s, Hamilton saw clearly the increasing role of the federal government in the South and other regions, and he continued his advocacy for damming the Savannah, now with the Corps as the best hope.

Hamilton and other city business and political leaders had had some luck previously in convincing the federal government to do more on the river, taking advantage of the early New Deal increases in spending on infrastructure projects. Money was included in the Public Works Administration in 1933 for a relatively small dam and lock at New Savannah Bluff, about thirteen miles downriver from Augusta, primarily as a navigation enhancement. Hamilton was part of a small group that had tried to interest the federal government in a downriver project like the New Savannah Bluff lock since the 1920s, even convincing the city to buy a steam packet boat, the *Altamaha*, to operate on the lower Savannah as a sign of the city’s commitment to commercial navigation. Built for about two million dollars, the lock

⁶⁹ Bell and Crabbe, 152-64.

was the kind of project that Hamilton argued should be paired with the large-scale dam at Clarks Hill above Augusta, since the dam and its massive reservoir would contribute to navigation by keeping an adequate flow of water in the river in dry times.⁷⁰

Hamilton's penchant for promotion and his focus on river development did not wane in the decade after the private utility made headlines with its Clarks Hill proposal. In 1935, pondering the future during the city's bicentennial, Hamilton continued to insist Augusta was destined to become "the capital of an industrial and agricultural empire" with further engineering of the river. How could it not be, with such "favorable" labor conditions – meaning low wages and no unions – good climate, plentiful raw materials, cheap hydroelectric power, and the intersection of seven railroads, three highways and the Savannah River? "There should be, and will be, constructed above Augusta huge storage dams that will hold the water back during flood . . . and release it for navigation," he assured his audience. "Great warehouses and industries will be attracted to Augusta and our river front for miles will be an industrial beehive with barges loading and unloading." Indeed, he wrote, Augusta soon would be well on the way to its inevitable status as "the great distributing center for one of the richest areas on the earth's surface," and would have at least 250,000 residents within thirty years, or roughly triple the population.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid.; and Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 115.

⁷¹ The Augusta area had about 82,000 residents in 1940, according to the Historical Statistics of the United States, "Table Aa1 179-1322 - Metropolitan areas - population: 1840-1990," <http://hsus.cambridge.org> (accessed July 30, 2009); Hamilton's comments in Bell and Crabbe, 156-60; while Bell and Crabbe state that the federal government allocated Works Progress Administration money for raising the Augusta levee in the 1930s, the 1936 report of the Savannah River Special Board attributed that funding to the federal Civil Works and Federal Emergency Relief agencies.

The context of Hamilton's forecasts, of course, had changed in meaningful ways between 1926 and 1935. With the Depression grinding on, Hamilton's relentlessly positive tone still seemed overblown at times in 1935, but perhaps it also was a beneficial source of hope in the Augusta area that economic conditions would improve. Nationally, the mid-thirties were a time of continuing experimentation with ambitious economic and social programs under the broad New Deal umbrella, including strong support from President Roosevelt for reshaping and harnessing American rivers for man's benefit to an even greater degree. Advocates for a large dam at Clarks Hill had reason to believe in these years that the concept could gain serious traction.

An observer of the river around Augusta in the mid-thirties would have seen work underway on the federally funded dam and lock south of the city at New Savannah Bluff, as well as ongoing work by the city to raise its levee along a part of the river, in response to a damaging flood in 1929. The city paid for the original levee, but it tapped into Civil Works Administration and Federal Emergency Relief Administration money to help pay for raising the levee in the thirties. North of Augusta, the observer would have seen the head of the Augusta Canal, begun by the city in 1846 and enlarged most recently in 1930. A small dam along the river about eight miles north of the city diverted water into the canal, and in 1935, the city was pumping water from the canal and eleven manufacturers were using it to run their machines. The industries, mainly textile mills, either used the water itself to turn wheels and shafts, or to turn small electric generators to power equipment.⁷²

⁷² Savannah River Special Board, "Clark Hill Navigation-Flood Control-Power Project, Savannah River, Georgia-South Carolina," Report to President Roosevelt, Washington, D.C., Feb. 29, 1936, 20-21 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

Another man-made riverwork in place by 1935 was the dam, hydropower plant and navigation lock on Stevens Creek owned by the South Carolina Power Company. Stevens Creek flowed from the South Carolina piedmont into the Savannah about nine miles north of Augusta, and the private utility had received a federal license in 1912 to build a dam at the confluence and generate a relatively small amount of power. The power plant at Stevens Creek had a capacity of about 21,600 kilowatts at that time, or roughly one-fifth of the capacity eventually installed at Clarks Hill Dam.⁷³

Bushwacking from the small crossroads of Clarks Hill, S.C., down to the river, the observer might have found Corps field crews investigating the site, but no sign of work on an actual dam. By 1935, the Corps had done some initial studies of multipurpose dams on the river at places like Clarks Hill, but it remained somewhat wary of committing to projects beyond navigation works. As mentioned previously, Congress in 1927 had directed the Corps to study a number of river basins with an eye on a number of possible uses, and the subsequent studies by Corps were known as “308” reports. As it turned out, in the 308 report for the Savannah basin submitted in 1933, District Engineer Maj. Creswell Garlington’s judgment was that, while Clarks Hill was the best place north of Augusta for a dam, building it at that time really did not make sense. He contended that Augusta was dealing adequately with flood concerns by raising its levee, the navigation channel on the river already authorized was sufficient, and there was not enough demand at that point for electricity the river could generate – and without the power component, the project was not economically

⁷³ Ibid., 18-19; and South Carolina Electric and Gas, “Stevens Creek Hydroelectric Project,” <http://www.sceg.com/NR/rdonlyres/25DD5351-2826-478B-9691-BE26A3F1CEB3/0/StevensCreekReport.pdf> (accessed April 20, 2009).

justified. At the same time, Garlington served political as well as technological masters, and perhaps to hedge his bets, he conceded in the report that a project combining hydropower and navigation goals might be justifiable at some future point.⁷⁴

Clarks Hill advocates continued to press the issue, and a delegation from Augusta that included Hamilton, Lester Moody and other members of the Savannah River Improvement Commission lobbied Garlington in May 1935. The district engineer told the group members that their best bet was to push for a project with both navigation and power goals, as well as flood control, and to focus on Clarks Hill as the best site. The group continued on its way along the channels of power, next meeting with the commanding general of the Corps, then getting time with Richard B. Russell and Walter F. George, the U.S. senators from Georgia, as well as U.S. Rep. Paul Brown. Some members of the delegation made their pitch directly to President Roosevelt that summer.⁷⁵

That pitch included a written petition, which mentioned the prevention of soil erosion as another potential benefit associated with a dam and reservoir at Clarks Hill, along with power, flood control and navigation. The petition dealt largely in absolutes, claiming that Clarks Hill would “completely” protect Augusta from “all” floods, and meet the electricity needs of current and future industries in Augusta and other urban and rural customers in the

⁷⁴ Barber and Gann, 130-31; also see transcript from hearing, Committee on Public Works, U.S. House of Reps., 80th Cong., 2nd Sess., March 1-3, 1948, in Edgar A. Brown Papers, Clemson.

⁷⁵ Barber and Gann, 419-20; it is not clear exactly who from the Augusta group met with the president. But given Roosevelt’s recognition of the importance of the South to the Democratic Party at that time, it seems likely he gladly would have schmoozed a group of local opinion leaders from Georgia at the White House.

Savannah River valley near the city for many years, all at reasonable power rates.⁷⁶ The benefits were meant, foremost, for the people in and around Augusta.

Roosevelt responded by appointing a “special board” in August 1935 to give him a current take on the idea of a dam at Clarks Hill, and possibly several other dams. Colonel Earl Brown, the top-ranking engineer in the South Atlantic region of the Corps, chaired the three-member board, which also had representatives from the National Resources Committee and the Federal Power Commission. More a committee-of-three than a board, the men had their report ready by February 1936.

They backed the Clarks Hill concept, recommending that work begin as soon as money was available. The board members gave a fairly detached, even-keeled endorsement of the concept. Still, they found net positives from every aspect of the project they considered, and called the Clarks Hill location “one of the best undeveloped power sites” among the rivers running to the sea in the South Atlantic states, on par with some of the sites on the Tennessee River. It was far enough south in the watershed to receive a reliably large volume of water, and the granite gneiss roughly thirty feet below the riverbed would be a perfect foundation for the concrete dam. Crunching the numbers and using what they claimed were conservative assumptions, the members estimated the cost at \$21.2 million, and concluded the value of power generated at the dam would be more than enough to pay for the entire project, for a net gain of about ten million dollars over a number of years.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Petition reprinted in transcript from hearing before the Committee on Public Works, March 1-3, 1948.

⁷⁷ Savannah River Special Board, Report to President Roosevelt, 36-49 and Appendix 2; the time period in which the board projected that the net gain would be realized is unclear in the report.

Why did the board reach this conclusion in 1936, when the Corps district engineer had recommended against it just three years earlier? A completely satisfying answer does not emerge from the record, in terms of shifting motivations and political maneuverings. But in part, the answer is that the board considered a larger project than in earlier studies, which had impacts such as doubling the capacity for storing water in the reservoir without doubling the cost. In addition, the larger project's capacity for generating prime power was about 63 percent higher, according to the board.⁷⁸ Finally, the national economy had started to show enough signs of life by 1936 that the board perhaps could be more optimistic in forecasting demand for electrical power.

In 1935, hydropower plants provided about 58 percent of the capacity in Georgia and the Carolinas for generating electricity, while steam plants burning coal or gas made up the other 42 percent. The board members were confident a market would exist for all the power that generators at Clarks Hill could spin off, provided that it included a moderate amount of capacity at first – four generators and a maximum of 120,000 kilowatts – and focused on generating base-load power, rather than power needed during peak periods. They predicted demand in Georgia and the Carolinas for such power would increase about 55 percent over the next decade. Even factoring in new dams planned by Georgia Power on the Oconee River, by the state of South Carolina on the Santee and Cooper rivers, and by Greenwood County, S.C., on the Saluda River, the chances were “excellent” that demand would exist for

⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

the power from all those facilities plus Clarks Hill – so long as Clarks Hill power was relatively cheap.⁷⁹

But the board embraced the project primarily for the possible benefits to navigation. The tone was that being able to sell power would be a nice bonus that covered the cost of the project, but it was not the central appeal. Since it was clear the Corps would play a key role if the federal government pursued Clarks Hill, and with the division engineer chairing the board, this tone reflected the Corps' proclivity for navigation and traditional role tied to interstate commerce. Without the dam, there were at least two months on average during the year when the river south of Augusta was so low it was difficult or impossible for boats and barges to use it. Water released from a reservoir at Clarks Hill would take care of that problem and turn a "part-time, uncertain, and unsatisfactory navigation channel into a transportation route of importance," with navigable depths of six feet available at all times, the members promised.⁸⁰

The board showed the least enthusiasm on the matter of flood control. The members did conclude that building Clarks Hill would help with controlling floods in Augusta, just that the benefits would not be as great as with navigation and power. They figured the project would "reduce" the stages of major floods downriver of the dam and "appreciably increase the margin of safety at Augusta" during such flooding. It was a matter of boosting the safety margin, rather than absolutely guaranteeing the city would never see flooding again.

The board's analysis started with the fact that, in the greatest flow on record at Augusta, during the flood of 1796, the river reached 360,000 cubic feet per second, with 1929 nearly

⁷⁹ Ibid., 22 and 38-41.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 46-49.

matching that level. It was “practically certain” the river would exceed that flow during some future flood, perhaps by as much as 20 percent. The board concluded that, even during a new-record flow of 430,000 cubic feet per second, the river still would not crest the top of Augusta’s levee. But a dam at Clarks Hill probably would add about three feet to the freeboard in the levee in such a flood, or the distance between the water and the top of the levee, and thus provide a “very liberal margin of safety,” the members suggested. They also estimated that adding the three extra feet of freeboard simply by raising the levee would cost about \$153,000, so that was roughly the dollar amount they allocated for the potential flood-control benefits of Clarks Hill.⁸¹

The board members cited unemployment relief as another reason they recommended the project, figuring that building the dam would generate about \$7.6 million in payroll payments. They also pointed to the likely creation of jobs in companies providing construction materials for the project. But this section was somewhat vague, with no mention of data such as the estimated number of jobs it would yield.

The members also were noticeably unspecific in their mention of the people whose land would be flooded by the reservoir. They estimated the federal government would have to acquire about 85,000 acres for the project, with slightly less than half of that amount already owned or controlled by the SREC. Their comments in effect were about the people who did not live there, rather than those who did, describing the effected land as “largely uninhabited sparsely wooded tracts and uncultivated fields, with only a small proportion of [cultivated] farm lands and with practically no farm buildings.” Nor were there any railroads or other

⁸¹ Ibid., 29-32.

“highly valuable” improvements that would have to be moved and therefore drive up the price tag. That expense would be only slightly more than the actual costs for buying land.⁸² In this sense, the view they gave of the project was similar to Hamilton’s portrait, in that the people who would have to sell land and/or move really were not part of the story.

With an eye on getting the states involved in helping to pay for Clarks Hill, President Roosevelt also asked the board for its take on whether some form of authority might be set up at the state or district level, to oversee the project and possibly future dams on the river. That was not likely to happen, the board members replied, after analyzing the Georgia and South Carolina constitutions and realizing the legislatures would have to pursue significant changes. The most workable options, they said, were to consider creating a new federal authority along the lines of the TVA, to have an existing federal agency such as the Corps build and run the entire project, or have a federal agency build the dam and allow another party to construct and operate the power plant. Ultimately, the entire project would fall to the Corps, although the SREC returned to the scene in the 1940s and made a last-ditch bid to control at least the power component of the project.⁸³

⁸² Ibid., 46-49.

⁸³ Ibid., 44.

CHAPTER TWO:

Origins – FDR, Public Power, and Southern Democrats

It was no surprise that President Roosevelt would be intrigued by the prospect of damming the Savannah. As he liked to note on occasion, Roosevelt grew up near the Hudson River, and he first got involved in issues of river development as a state senator in New York after 1910. He began to more sharply refine his position on those issues as governor of New York, then as a candidate for president, and finally during his administrations. Projects like Clarks Hill fit nicely with his interests because two of the themes most critical to him were at work: public, rather than private, control of rivers for uses such as hydropower; and construction of dams with several purposes in mind, with the potential for developing a river basin in a more comprehensive, planned way.⁸⁴

Roosevelt staked out his position in favor of public control of rivers early on, particularly in terms of their potential for generating power. That stance fit well with his overall embracing of the conservationism of the times – the use of natural resources for human purposes more wisely and scientifically than in the past, with an eye on replenishing those resources where possible. During his unsuccessful candidacy for vice president in 1920, Roosevelt told a crowd in Billings, Montana, that it was time to tap into the nation’s natural resources more fully, given the country’s growth in population and commerce, and increasing

⁸⁴ See John E. Thorson, *River of Promise, River of Peril: The Politics of Managing the Missouri River* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); Thorson states that the “comprehensive approach to river basin development embodied in the TVA became the model for similar proposals for other river basins...,” 60-61; for comments on comprehensive development, see debate in Congress over the 1944 Flood Control bill, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, 90, pt. 7: 8616-9246.

migration into cities. The nation had been wasteful and destructive of those resources at the turn of the century, but leaders were able to slow that rapacious approach and put more emphasis on wise use, he argued. The appropriate and logical next step was to pursue more development of natural resources along with conservation.⁸⁵

Roosevelt came of age personally and politically during the rise of the modern conservation movement of America, and his thinking about rivers and natural resources in general reflected that influence. As Samuel Hays has described it, the movement that developed roughly between 1890 and 1920 was intertwined with progressivism, and it essentially was a drive for “rational planning to promote efficient development and use of all natural resources.” The movement was rooted in a deep faith in the power of science and technology to identify the best approach. The American West was the formative ground, where leaders grappled with the question of how rivers might foster the growth both of farm crops and communities. Indeed, it was called a movement for “conservation” in part because conserving the spring floodwaters of rivers in manmade reservoirs for use during dry months was a central concept.⁸⁶

When Franklin Roosevelt backed the development of rivers for multiple purposes, he was building on a foundation laid to a large degree by his cousin, Theodore Roosevelt. During his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt came to support a multi-purpose approach to engineering rivers. Samuel Hays argued that, while the Corps of Engineers resisted that approach and Congress blocked most of Roosevelt’s efforts, the multi-purpose development of rivers in the

⁸⁵ Speech published in Edgar B. Nixon, ed., *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Conservation, 1911-1945*, Vol. One (Hyde Park, NY: National Archives and Records Service, 1957), 40-41.

⁸⁶ Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 2-3 and 5.

New Deal ultimately was a culmination of those efforts. Hays cited scientists with the U.S. Geological Survey as early proponents of exploring all the possible uses of a river's waters that could benefit man, and he cast the Corps as a countervailing force that wanted all uses to remain secondary to navigation. The issue of public versus private control of river development already was part of the debate in the early 1900s, as was hydropower, with reservoir advocates pointing to power generation as a good way to pay for projects.⁸⁷

Irving Brant, an advisor to Franklin Roosevelt on conservation issues during the 1930s, described several conservation battles in which Roosevelt was involved in his first two terms, primarily the creation of national parks and monuments in the West. Brant, also a longtime newspaperman and author, portrayed Roosevelt as having genuine appreciation for the wonders on non-human nature and commitment to conservation. But his stories also reveal the undercurrent of the intense lobbying by interests such as the timber industry, and the national political scene in which the president operated. There were times when Roosevelt was open to compromises such as allowing logging at least in portions of areas that the federal government wanted to set aside, reflecting his interests in conservationist use of natural resources, rather than roping them off completely.⁸⁸

Roosevelt portrayed rivers as a critical means of spreading electricity, the “greatest of American discoveries,” more broadly to the people – a tool of democratization. In a sign of his political savvy, he sought to align the Democrats with a sense of ownership and use of electricity by the masses, and cast the Republicans as partners-in-greed with private power

⁸⁷ Ibid., 8-9, 22-23 and 91-121.

⁸⁸ Irving Brant, *Adventures in Conservation with Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing Company, 1988).

companies that worried mainly about supplying power to big business. In New York, he waded into the fight over development of the St. Lawrence River, and charged while running for governor in 1928 that the private utilities and their Republican allies were trying “steal our heritage” in pursuing rights to build private hydropower dams on the St. Lawrence. He also wanted to see the St. Lawrence developed for better navigation, he tilted with utilities such as the Niagara Falls Power Company, and pushed through creation of the New York Power Authority in 1931. Roosevelt even found a way to put the issue of hydropower in gender terms, telling an audience during his bid for a second term as governor that to “lighten the drudgery of housekeeping” was a key aim of drawing public power from rivers like the St. Lawrence. He lamented that the housewives of New York could not enjoy the wonders of electricity at the high rates charged by private companies – perhaps appealing to both the men and women voters in his crowd.⁸⁹

It was not that Roosevelt wanted to preserve this natural “heritage” of the people in its free-flowing state. He was eager to see engineering of rivers for human uses like power generation, but he wanted the government to keep control of the potential to a great extent. In his inaugural address as New York governor in 1929, he lamented that, over the course of his speech, “there has run to waste on their paths toward the sea, enough power from our rivers to have turned the wheels of a thousand factories, to have lit a million farmers’ homes – power which nature has supplied us through the gift of God.” He allowed no excuse for

⁸⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, speech in Syracuse, NY, Oct. 23, 1928, annual message to the New York legislature, Jan. 1, 1930, and speech in Syracuse, Oct. 22, 1930, all in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1938), 44-51, 91-92 and 419.

letting partisan battles block development of the valuable resource that the St. Lawrence and other waterways represented.⁹⁰

The notion that a river undammed was a river wasted ran consistently through many of Roosevelt's speeches. As president, he spread his ardor for dam projects beyond the Northeast, to the Tennessee River in the South and the Columbia, the Colorado and other rivers in the West. Just before his inauguration in 1933, he used a visit to a stretch of the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals, Alabama, to pitch his vision for putting Muscle Shoals "to work" in generating power, and for a much broader development of the river from the Virginia mountains to the Ohio River and down to the Gulf of Mexico. His ambitious – and vaguely defined – goal would be somehow to bring projects for industry, agriculture, forestry, and flood prevention "into a unified whole" to create better job opportunities and communities for millions of people in the valley. Congress gave Roosevelt a chance to make this vision work when it approved the Tennessee Valley Authority later that year.⁹¹

As president, he continued pushing his vision for greater federal development of the St. Lawrence River. By that point, he was calling for four large "power areas" in the country to include hydropower projects with electrical rates setting a standard for comparison with rates from private utilities. In other words, the government-owned projects could be a source of pressure on private providers to keep their rates down. Things were happening in three of the areas Roosevelt described, on the Columbia, Colorado and Tennessee rivers, but the Northeast was lacking a large-scale undertaking, hence the president's focus on the St.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., also see Roosevelt's remarks while visiting Muscle Shoals, Ala., Jan. 21, 1933, *Public Papers and Addresses*, vol. 1, 887-89.

Lawrence, a potential means of “incomparably cheap power” within reach of both industrial and household customers.⁹²

Later in 1934, the president visited three major federal dams under construction as early New Deal projects: the Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams on the Columbia River in Oregon and Washington, and Fort Peck Dam on the upper Missouri River in Montana. Bonneville Dam was evidence of what humans could do to improve their conditions, and Grand Coulee was another step toward “making the American people ‘dam-minded,’” Roosevelt proclaimed. At Ft. Peck, he insisted it was not true, as some had been saying in the Northwest, that the federal government was telling people on “marginal lands” likely to be flooded by dams that they had just one day to leave their homes.

On the other hand, he added, it was an irrefutable fact that many families were struggling mightily to make ends meet, using degraded land that no longer was appropriate for farming. “Now, if those families want to go on farming that land and go deeper in the red every year, I take it [as] their affair,” Roosevelt said. “On the other hand, your government believes in giving them a chance to go to better places – a voluntary chance.”⁹³ It was a telling claim, partly because Roosevelt’s view of what should be done with land that had been eroded, drained of nutrients or otherwise made “marginal” was important in the official justification for dam projects – and dispossession of owners and residents – in places such as the Tennessee Valley. If push came to shove, he clearly was willing to see hundreds or thousands of families moved off the land, in order to take that land out of cultivation and to pursue the other goals of dam projects. The condition of farmland along the Savannah River was a

⁹² Roosevelt, *Public Papers and Addresses*, vol. 3, comments to the U.S. Senate, Jan. 10, 1934, 29-40.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, remarks at Bonneville, Grand Coulee, and Ft. Peck dams, Aug. 3-6, 1934, 352-65.

factor in the argument for Clarks Hill Dam. And as with Clarks Hill and many other projects, there was nothing voluntary, for many people, about the federal acquisition of property.

Roosevelt also stopped in eastern Tennessee in 1934 to check on the construction of Norris Dam, the first project of the TVA. He gave a pep talk to the workers there, dubbing them “veterans of a new kind of war,” a war to improve the living conditions of millions of Americans. He talked more about the TVA a week later at his retreat in Warm Springs, Ga., making comments that showed his vision for federal dams was not always consistent, concise, and neatly argued. His arguments shifted at times, perhaps because he was playing to a specific audience, and his thoughts likely were evolving as well.

He told a group of reporters at Warm Springs that hydropower actually was a valuable but secondary goal for the TVA. The primary idea was to remake both the living conditions of the people in the valley, and to remold the people themselves. He hoped the authority could “make a different type of citizen out of them from what they would be under their present conditions,” which included great poverty and low educational standards. “They have never had a chance,” he said about many of the valley’s residents. “All you had to do was look at the houses in which they lived.”⁹⁴ The implication running near the surface in such comments was that, given the way people lived and the condition of their land, the best thing for them – whether they realized it or not – was to move on and make way for a dam that eventually would make things better for them and many others. What was missing was an awareness of the strong ties that people felt to such houses and farms, even with the real hardships that Roosevelt hoped to alleviate.

⁹⁴ Ibid., remarks at Norris Dam site, Nov. 16, 1934, 458, and press conference at Warm Springs, Nov. 23, 1934, 466-67.

In 1935, just three months after appointing the special board on the Savannah River, he gave the dedication for Boulder Dam, which the federal Bureau of Reclamation built on the Colorado River along the border of Arizona and Nevada, the world's biggest hydropower dam at that time. The president spun a narrative about human ingenuity transforming the site from an "unpeopled, forbidding desert" into an awe-inspiring dam and the newly created Boulder City, and the "turbulent, dangerous river" into a more controlled, useful feature. The danger he alluded to was flooding, and along with hydropower at reduced rates, the benefits Roosevelt extolled included flood control, irrigation, navigation from the dam down to the Grand Canyon, and recreation. "We know that, as an unregulated river, the Colorado added little of value to the region this dam serves," he proclaimed. "The mighty waters of the Colorado were running unused to the sea. Today we translate them into a great national possession."⁹⁵ In those terms, the river itself was not a truly American feature in its free-flowing state; it took engineering and manpower to give the country rightful ownership.

Likewise, giving an address some five years later at Chickamauga Dam near Chattanooga, Tenn., Roosevelt spoke of the river before the dam only in negative terms. It had been merely a "vagrant stream sometimes shallow and useless, sometimes turbulent and in flood, always dark with the soil it had washed from the eroding hills," before the TVA started its work to firmly establish human control over the river. To a degree he was making the river a scapegoat, since the human use of lands along the river had made the soil susceptible to erosion, not the river itself. He was more expansive on the goals for the TVA than in his 1934 comments at Warm Springs, giving a laundry list that included better

⁹⁵ Roosevelt, *Public Papers and Addresses*, vol. 4, dedication of Boulder Dam, Sept. 30, 1935, 397-402; the facility was named Hoover Dam in the late 1940s, actually a restoration of the originally intended name.

navigation, lakes for recreation, prevention of erosion, research into phosphate fertilizers, generation of power, flood control, reforestation, providing employment, and improving the overall social and economic life in the valley. He again seemed to gloss over the dispossession and dislocation prompted by the six existing TVA dams. He claimed that, in the TVA's short history, no citizen had lost "a single one of these human liberties that we prize so highly in this democracy." From his point of view, it had been a highly democratic process in which thousands of local people had participated.⁹⁶

As local boosters later would do with Clarks Hill, Roosevelt promoted a vision of the TVA lakes as man-made – but somehow natural – "inland seas," suggesting the reservoirs could properly be dubbed the "Great Lakes of the South." If the real Great Lakes were a beneficial resource for states such as Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, then the TVA was leveling the score for the South. A perception of nature also was reflected in the president's contention that many people in the Tennessee River valley were "fighting against nature" in trying to wring a subsistence from exhausted and eroded farmland. Instead, they should be "fighting with nature," by allowing a series of dams to control the river and make it their ally in creating a better, more modern life.⁹⁷ Lacking was the image of the dams themselves as fighting nature, in terms of drastically changing the flow and shape of the river and the lands through which it ran. After all, the very essence of a dam is in opposition to the river.

Roosevelt's thinking evolved over time, with many consistencies but also a shifting focus on what he wanted dam projects to accomplish, at least in his public comments. His promotion of the TVA along with the big dams in the West during these years helped shape

⁹⁶ Roosevelt, *Public Papers and Addresses*, vol. 9, remarks at Chickamauga Dam, Nov. 2, 1940, 359-69.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

the national context, and create a political environment in which proponents of Clarks Hill could believe they would find favor. In 1936, about three months after the Savannah River board reported to him, the president signed a new Flood Control Act, establishing another critical element of the national context and milestone in river development. The 1936 act “established an enormous commitment by the federal government to protect people and property on approximately 100 million acres,” according to historian Joseph Arnold.⁹⁸ The act did not include Clarks Hill, but in its scope and expansion of the federal government’s role in flood control, it was a vital precursor to the 1944 Flood Control Act that did authorize Clarks Hill.

The federal government had been inching toward greater involvement in limiting floods in the decades before 1936, with steps such as smaller flood control acts in 1917 and ’28, and directives to the Corps in the 1920s to include data on flood control in their assessments of rivers. It was an incremental shift, away from the belief held by many in Congress that the federal government had no constitutional authority to build flood-control projects, except perhaps on the Mississippi River. The dominant interpretation was that such projects mainly offered local benefits, and therefore, local communities should pay for them. The original levee in Augusta reflected this viewpoint – the city had to build it and bear most of the cost. At the same time, Arnold contends, there was a certain amount of fudging prior to 1936, as Congress sometimes authorized projects “under the guise” of navigation benefits when it was clear to lawmakers that flood-control aims also were at work.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Joseph Arnold, *The Evolution of the 1936 Flood Control Act* (Ft. Belvoir, VA: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1988), 91.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-7.

Increasing pushes in the earlier Progressive Era for a more active federal government were a factor in the shift, along with a number of damaging floods in the first four decades of the century in all the major river basins. The steady growth of the country meant more people living within reach of flooding rivers, as well as more human changes to watersheds that made flooding worse, such as deforestation. Spring and summer floods in 1935 in places as far-ranging as Virginia, New York State and Texas caused about 236 deaths and \$130 million in damage, and prompted more than one hundred new bills for flood-control projects in Congress. The next spring, floods hit many rural communities as well as major urban areas such as Pittsburgh, killing about 107 people in the Northeast and west to Ohio. By that point, the primary sentiment among national lawmakers was that they needed to do more about the “great national menace” of major floods.¹⁰⁰

In the days after those floods, the *New York Times* called for a greater national effort to tackle flooding problems, through advanced technology and creative thinking, and to do it as part of a more comprehensive approach to engineering rivers. The country should get on with “curbing and utilizing our water resources as a whole,” from coast to coast, the newspaper editorialized in March 1936. “If the floods have taught us anything, it is the need of something more than a dam here and storage reservoir there. We must think of drainage areas embracing the whole country – think of small projects which number thousands, but which are necessary, individual pieces in a vast mosaic of definite pattern ...”¹⁰¹ It was something Roosevelt might have said, imagining rivers as both a threat and a valuable natural resource.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 18-24 and 50-60.

¹⁰¹ “After the deluge,” editorial in *New York Times*, March 22, 1936.

In the midst of a contentious election year, the president signed the Flood Control Act in June 1936, authorizing the Corps to pursue a number of dams, levees and other projects to reduce flood risks primarily in the Northeast, Southern California, and the Arkansas River basin. While the act's establishment of the federal government's role in flood control was clear, the process and results were messy in many ways. The directions for actually accomplishing the projects were muddled, thanks to a "rather hastily drawn series of implementation features that were a patchwork of compromises thrown together by overworked Congressmen on the eve of the [elections] of 1936," in Arnold's assessment.¹⁰² Arnold largely gives lawmakers a pass for their hasty action, arguing they were willing to take such a major step without studying the impacts more thoroughly because they were driven by a humanitarian impulse after the '36 floods, and they also believed in the technology. He describes flood-control projects since that year as important symbols of Americans' "technical skills and humane spirit," but he does not mention the impacts on residents and landowners who had to give way to projects.¹⁰³

Arnold notes that Roosevelt's positions on the interrelated issues of flood control, overall river development and conservation were complicated. They showed both his practical and romantic sides, Arnold contends. Roosevelt dreamed about projects that could do many things at once – conserve the soil, re-plant forests, irrigate farmland, promote farming done in a scientific way, create parks, make peoples' lives better – but he accepted many projects that met only some of those goals. Arnold also contends that Roosevelt did not have the same

¹⁰² Arnold, *Evolution of the 1936 Flood Control Act*, viii, 72 and 83.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 91.

passion for rivers and water resources as he did for farmland and forests.¹⁰⁴ Considering how often Roosevelt talked about river development, Arnold seems to miss the mark on that point. But, at another level, he makes an accurate observation, in that Roosevelt aimed to conserve soil and forest lands, but wanted to use rivers to the maximum.

Clarks Hill advocates initially thought they might secure the dam as a project of the Public Works Administration. However, as the role of that New Deal agency waned, they turned their focus to the next version of national flood-control legislation. The Flood Control Act of 1938 actually included a dam at Clarks Hill, but the project stalled after debate broke out over exactly what that act had authorized. The project also was included in another flood-control measure that apparently was vetoed by President Roosevelt, over concerns about the cost of other projects in the bill.¹⁰⁵

During that time period, James F. Brynes was one South Carolina's senators in Congress, and knowing that Brynes was a confidante of Pres. Roosevelt, advocates lobbied Brynes to get Clarks Hill passed. They also recognized that Brynes had been successful in gaining approval for an earlier federal dam project in South Carolina – the Santee Cooper hydropower and flood-control project south of Columbia. Hugh C. Middleton, an Augusta businessman, urged Brynes to promote Clarks Hill to Roosevelt partly in the name of creating landclearing and construction jobs on the project. Middleton also pointed to the broader goals of creating hydropower and other benefits, and invoked the TVA as an

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁵ Clarks Hill Authority, "Panorama of Progress Unrolls with Clark Hill Development Plan," 1948, in Edgar A. Brown Papers, MSS 91, series 2, box 15, folder 202, Clemson University, 12-13; also see comments by U.S. Sen. Richard B. Russell, 78th Cong., 2d sess., *Cong. Rec.* 90, pt. 7: 9246; and James F. Brynes to Wilton Hall, April 8, 1940, letter in Brynes Papers, MSS 90, series 2, box 7, folder 5, Clemson.

example of the kind of ambitious program that Roosevelt should support for the Savannah River valley. Before moving to Augusta, Middleton had grown up in the community of Clarks Hill, and he stated that his family had lived there for four generations. He owned property in the Clarks Hill area and apparently had been promoting the idea of a hydropower dam there since 1898.¹⁰⁶

Seeking to keep Clarks Hill alive, the advocates created the Savannah River Development Board in 1940, naming Augusta's Lester Moody as president and claiming several hundred members. By 1944, after more delay during the war, Moody was looking for any possible strategies. When Clarks Hill made it into the flood-control bill before Congress that year, Moody got a list of the proposed projects in the bill, and led a letter-writing campaign to more than 700 officials and chambers of commerce where the projects were located, from the Housatonic River in Connecticut, to the Ventura River in California. The letters urged people in those communities to push their representatives to pass the bill, which Congress eventually did in December.¹⁰⁷

While the president's signing of the Flood Control Act that month was a critical step for Clarks Hill, it was a relatively dormant project in the following year. Roosevelt's death in Warm Springs in April 1945, the conclusion of the war in Europe in May and then in the Pacific in August claimed a large share of the nation's attention. It was spring 1946 before the final episode in the origins of Clarks Hill began to unfold in the conference rooms of

¹⁰⁶ Hugh C. Middleton, to James F. Brynes, Jan. 18, 1936, and May 15, 1939, letters in Brynes Papers, MSS 90 series 2, box 7, folders 5 and 6, Clemson.

¹⁰⁷ "Panorama of Progress," 14-16; copy of the Flood Control Act of 1944 at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Water Resource Development Acts," <http://www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/Omnibus/FCA1944.pdf> (accessed Nov. 25, 2007).

Augusta's once-popular downtown hotels, at the Georgia state capitol, and in testy Congressional committee hearings that included at least one instance of subtle red-baiting at the expense, ironically, of conservative Democrat Edgar A. Brown of South Carolina. The debate in these years largely was about whether Clarks Hill would be a federal or private project, rather than whether the project was needed. But in arguing for a public project, proponents reiterated the case for the dam, and added additional points for good measure.

The Savannah River Electric Co. was able to keep the question of exactly who would build Clarks Hill in play for about three years, starting with its application for a new federal license in March 1946. The prospect of Clarks Hill as the first of nearly a dozen federal dams on the Savannah could not have been encouraging for the private utility and its parent company, Georgia Power, which did not want to be shut out of tapping the river's latent potential for hydropower. It meant to pursue every angle in its interests, starting with the license application that would allow the company to make its pitch and seek allies.

By 1946, many of the state and national officials in Georgia and South Carolina who cared about Clarks Hill were ready to see it move ahead as a Corps project. They cast their lot with the federal government in part because, for the Corps, it was an authorized project, while it still was just a vague proposal for the SREC. Edgar Brown, the prominent state senator from South Carolina who played a key role in this late-forties episode, insisted the SREC did not actually want to build the dam at Clarks Hill; it just wanted to sew up the rights and ward off public competition. To take the lead in pushing for the federal project, the South Carolina legislature created the Clarks Hill Authority in April 1946 and installed Brown as chairman and general counsel. Hugh C. Brown, a McCormick legislator and no

relation to Edgar Brown, served as executive secretary for the authority, and he would appear again in the record a few years later, when the Corps's land acquisition affected his family.¹⁰⁸

Claiming strong support for the dam as a Corps project was one of the authority's first actions. It garnered the signatures of all the South Carolina state senators and 100 of the 124 state representatives on a supportive petition. The authority also sent out a mailing and claimed about 1,500 responses to a question on whether people wanted Clarks Hill to be public or private – but not whether they wanted any dam at all. The authority reported that some 90 percent of the respondents favored a public project.¹⁰⁹

Brown, born in 1888 in Aiken County, S.C., was a lawyer who had served in both chambers of the state legislature by 1946. He represented Barnwell County and had gained enough influence in South Carolina politics to be known as a prominent member of the “Barnwell Ring” of Democratic powerbrokers. Brown was a longtime advocate of government involvement in providing electricity, working in roles such as general counsel for the S.C. Electric Power Consumers Association in the 1930s. He shared that interest in public power with Franklin Roosevelt, and he also established a personal connection with Roosevelt in 1931. When Brown gave a speech to the Georgia Municipal Power Association in Warm Springs, he sought out the prospective presidential candidate, and Roosevelt talked to Brown about his desire for the government to help spread electricity to rural areas.¹¹⁰

During Roosevelt's presidency, Brown came to share deep misgivings with his fellow southern Democrats about the growth of federal involvement in the South during and after

¹⁰⁸ Clarks Hill Authority, “Panorama of Progress,” 18.

¹⁰⁹ Clarks Hill Authority, “Truth About the Clarks Hill Project,” and “Panorama of Progress,” 19 (in an earlier draft of the section called “A Change of Mind”).

¹¹⁰ Workman, *Bishop from Barnwell*, 78-79.

the New Deal. Even as he supported Clarks Hill Dam, he resisted the notion of turning federal development of the Savannah River into a “little TVA,” insisting that the states needed more control of such efforts. And though he battled the private SREC in its bid for a license, Brown was far from anti-business, promoting economic development while reaping personal rewards as an officer or director of at least eighteen different private companies during his political and legal career. But in general, he seemed to accept Roosevelt’s sometimes-chaotic experimentation during the New Deal, even if he had doubts as a conservative southerner. He argued that the cornucopia of federal programs in the 1930s very likely prevented a “political revolution” in the U.S.¹¹¹ In that sense, Brown’s acceptance of greater federal involvement served his greater desire to conserve the overall order.

The first arena in 1946 for debating the question of a public or private Clarks Hill was the Federal Power Commission hearing on the SREC’s license application, held in October at the Georgia statehouse. Along with the utility’s representatives, witnesses included advocates for a federal dam, such as Strom Thurmond. Thurmond was campaigning that fall, and it showed in his comments at the hearing. He was elected governor of South Carolina the next month partly on his promise to stem the power of the “Barnwell Ring” that Brown helped lead, and Thurmond would defeat Brown directly about seven years later for a U.S. Senate seat. But Thurmond and Brown were allies in advocating for Clarks Hill as a Corps project. Working a popular-support angle at the hearing, Thurmond pointed to recreation as an important benefit of the reservoir to the “common man.” Beyond the technological functions, the project would

¹¹¹ Ibid., 11, 29, and 88.

be a boon to the “working people, the farmers, textile workers, barbers, mechanics, people on the street” who could fish, boat, or otherwise recreate on the lake, Thurmond promised.¹¹²

Also testifying at the hearing, a Georgian named Walter Harrison similarly imagined a public Clarks Hill as a recreation haven for the “common man,” as opposed to power-company lakes that, in his view, were just the private playgrounds of the elites of politics and business. But the core of his statement was a desire for the competitive influence of a government-owned source of electricity at Clarks Hill. Harrison talked about public-power rates as an important “yardstick,” or point of comparison with private utility rates, the same term used by Clarks Hill advocates like Brown and Thurmond, and even Roosevelt in arguing for public power around the country.¹¹³ If a yardstick was a tool for measuring private rates, it also could be a metaphorical bludgeon for keeping the power companies a bit more honest in those rates.

Harrison was a classic big fish in a small pond in mid-century Georgia. The small pond was the town of Millen, about seventy miles south of Clarks Hill and just outside the Savannah River watershed. Harrison sold insurance and real estate there, and was editor and publisher of the *Millen News*. In 1946, he also happened to be the mayor of Millen, as well as a member of the Georgia General Assembly representing Jenkins County. Finally, he was president of both the local electric membership corporation in Millen, and the statewide group of forty-four rural electric cooperatives around Georgia. The Clarks Hill Authority

¹¹² Testimony summarized in Clarks Hill Authority, “Truth About Clarks Hill,” 18.

¹¹³ Statement of the Honorable Walter Harrison, reprinted in “Truth About Clarks Hill,” 22-30.

wanted to see the electricity from a federal dam at Clarks Hill go first to such rural cooperatives, and secondly to industrial users.¹¹⁴

Harrison seemed most interested in continuing the spread of electricity into rural areas. He did express the requisite interest in aiding flood control, improving navigation on the river, ensuring adequate water year-round for Savannah harbor, and pursuing broader goals like conserving soil, instead of allowing more erosion to wash away the “riches of the land” in the Savannah valley. He professed to believe that a program of soil conservation on the lands around a reservoir at Clarks Hill could set a good example for protecting natural resources in the two states. Harrison said he was not convinced the power company truly intended to build the Clarks Hill project, and even if it did, he could not imagine a private utility giving much if any attention to such multiple purposes. And he urged people to ponder the TVA, or the great western dams like Grand Coulee. Had not the federal government established a good track record with those projects of serving a range of public interests?

But beyond the functions that meshed with the official mission of the Corps, Harrison was most animated about the prospect of federal hydropower at Clarks Hill creating a yardstick for electrical rates. He put the farmers of the region on a Jeffersonian pedestal as the “backbone and the bulwark of democracy,” and said he wanted them to have access to power at one cent per kilowatt hour, only possible with public power applying pressure to rates. Georgia Power had a near-monopoly that gave him serious pause, Harrison said, operating in about 80 percent of the state. Access to TVA power for some customers was one

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; also see minutes of the Clarks Hill Authority, May 8, 1946 meeting, in Edgar Brown papers, folder 202, box 15. Note: the Rural Electrification Administration was established in 1935 and made loans to rural cooperatives as a means of expanding the distribution system for electricity in rural areas.

of the few factors that led Georgia Power to cut its rates, he contended. “Do you think they would have voluntarily reduced the rates in Georgia had it not been that [citizens] were finding out what it cost to generate and transmit electricity?” In fact, he claimed, new industries would be drawn to an area with two reliable, competing sources of power.¹¹⁵

Along with arguing before federal officials, the utility made its case directly to the public with advertisements in 1946 in papers like the *Chronicle* in Augusta. One ad appealed to concerns about taxes and asked people to think about what their schools, roads, hospitals, and police and fire protection would be like in ten years. The company, not surprisingly, predicted that such services and facilities would be in much better shape with a private Clarks Hill project, since the company would have to pay all taxes, while the federal government would not. “Protect your tax revenues,” SREC President Preston Arkwright cautioned. “Let private enterprise give Georgia the greatest single project in its history.”¹¹⁶

The company took out a series of even larger ads in the Lincolnton newspaper between August and October, under headlines like “All of the Benefits None of the Burdens,” and “To Tame a Mighty River and Make it Work for You.” The ads reiterated the central point about the local and state taxes that the SREC would pay, unlike the Corps, and questioned whether Congress would ever fully fund the project. The company chose its words carefully, stating that it would “generally” follow the same plans for Clarks Hill that the Corps proposed, and that the electricity would be distributed “at low rates under state regulation” – thereby leaving itself some wiggle room on those rates. Another ad stated, “Thousands of horsepower

¹¹⁵ Clarks Hill Authority, minutes of meeting on May 8, 1946, folder 202, Edgar A. Brown Papers.

¹¹⁶ “Ten years from now... what kind of schools will your county have?” advertisement in *Augusta Chronicle*, Oct. 9, 1946.

of energy – unchecked and untamed – rushing to the sea! Under the [SREC]’s proposal for the development of Clark Hill this power will be harnessed and put to work for you.” The ad copy expressed an attitude toward the river that both public and private advocates shared, even while they differed over who should do the harnessing.¹¹⁷

In a sign of Georgia Power’s influence, the SREC found an ally in the *Lincoln Journal*, and in at least some of the citizens of the area. While the company was running those ads in the *Journal*, editor John P. Drinkard Sr., was making the same basic arguments as the SREC, and often using similar wording. He wrote three editorials in August and October in support of the company’s plans, citing the tax implications as “chief among the reasons” that the paper and a “very large majority” of local residents supported a private project. “The *Journal* is a believer in free, individual enterprise as a matter of principle and public policy,” Drinkard stated, arguing the government should not be in competition with private business, and that the government was not better suited than a private company to operate an enterprise efficiently and effectively for customers. “Private industry is not failing Georgia,” he contended. “On the contrary, if allowed to go ahead full speed, it will build a stronger and richer Georgia to the advantage of everyone throughout the state.”¹¹⁸

The *Journal* also noted strong support in neighboring Columbia County for a private hydropower project at Clarks Hill. The Columbia county commissioners, the school board,

¹¹⁷ Ads in *Lincoln Journal*, 1946, including “The Clark Hill proposal and what it means to Georgia,” Sept. 19, “All of the benefits none of the burdens,” Sept. 26, “To tame a mighty river and make it work for you,” Oct. 3, “Do you want Georgia’s finest playground at your back door,” Oct. 17, and “Who would you get to build a house,” Oct. 24.

¹¹⁸ Editorials in *Lincoln Journal*, 1946, including “Private development preferable,” Aug. 29, “Clark Hill Dam,” Oct. 3, and “Tax loss that would result to Lincoln County under government ownership,” Oct. 10. In his Oct. 3 editorial, John Drinkard Sr. wrote the dam would be the “greatest single development in the history of Georgia,” while the SREC’s ad on that day called it the “greatest single project in Georgia’s history.”

and the local teachers' association all passed resolutions in October in support of the SREC, primarily because of tax concerns. The resolutions repeated the same assurances offered by the private utility, that the best chance to have the project actually built was with the SREC, the power rates would be properly regulated, and the same goals of flood control, navigation, and recreation all would be met.¹¹⁹

The issue brought out an important difference in the perspectives of advocates in counties like Lincoln and Columbia, where the lake would be located, and those in the downstream, urban community of Augusta. The people in the Augusta area would reap benefits from Clarks Hill without experiencing the potentially negative impacts, since no land was acquired in the city and surrounding Richmond County. Drinkard pointed out that largely rural Lincoln County already struggled with a property-tax base insufficient to support services that the county needed to provide; having the federal government take tens of thousands of acres out of that tax base would be a significant blow.

The editor challenged a recent statement from Lester Moody about the tax consequences for Lincoln if the Corps built Clarks Hill, charging that Moody had underestimated those consequences by more than half. Drinkard insisted the *Journal* was not looking to delay the dam project, even if the federal government were the entity to build it, but he added, "We are just a little afraid that our friends down the river (in Augusta) have but little regard for the interest of Lincoln County in their eagerness to have the project developed in their own set

¹¹⁹ Lincoln *Journal*, Oct. 24, 1946, reprint of an article from the Augusta *Chronicle*.

pet way.” As it turned out, the Corps acquired roughly 61,000 acres in Lincoln, or more than 40 percent of the land in the county.¹²⁰

The argument for Clarks Hill as a government project prevailed, beginning with the Federal Power Commission’s ruling. The commission, which had participated in recommending a Corps project at Clarks Hill ten years earlier, turned down the SREC’s application after the hearing in Atlanta. The Corps started a limited amount of work on the project that year and into the spring of 1947, although Congress still had not allocated the bulk of construction money.¹²¹

The initial flurry of activity stirred a level of excitement among observers, including some who clearly bought into the promises made by advocates of the dam. By May 1947, the Clarks Hill community was a “beehive of activity,” according to a trade-journal writer who visited the scene, where “men in khaki returned to tramp the woods, put up little red flags, run surveyor’s lines,” and bulldozers moved earth for access roads. A certified boom was coming to Clarks Hill even before completion of the dam, because someone would need to house, feed, and entertain the predicted 3,000 construction workers, according to this writer. Surely the influx of workers earning paychecks meant that “residents of Clarks Hill will be wealthy beyond their dreams and may even own the first yachts that cruise the man-made lake,” the writer gushed, while describing the area to be flooded as swamp and bottomland

¹²⁰ Editorials in the *Lincoln Journal*, Aug. 29 and Oct. 10, 1946; figures for total acreage and percentage in Lincoln in Corps of Engineers, “Master Plan for Development and Management Clark Hill Reservoir,” 5, and *Lincoln Journal*, April 17, 1952.

¹²¹ The costs for building Clarks Hill eventually totaled nearly \$80 million by 1954, well above early estimates such as \$21.6 million in 1939 and \$35.3 million in 1944; see Workman, *Bishop from Barnwell*, 82, and Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 426.

and giving no sense of the people living and farming there.¹²² The construction riches did not necessarily pan out for people around Clarks Hill and vicinity, considering that a newspaper reporter noted in 1951 that most of the dam workers were living in Augusta.¹²³

When the SREC pressed its case in the courts and came up short by the end of 1947, it turned to a modified goal – asking for approval to build and/or control only the power plant at the dam. The company was willing to play hardball, according to Edgar Brown, who charged in an authority meeting at Augusta’s Bon Air Hotel that the SREC was maneuvering behind the scenes to drive up initial construction bids so that the Corps had to reject them.¹²⁴ Thurmond, the governor, spoke at the meeting as well, reiterating his point about recreation as a key benefit from Clarks Hill, with a twist. It would provide places to hunt and fish for people “on the street who haven’t the money to join expensive country clubs, or buy fine horses,” Thurmond stated, so that those people would have less time to “get into trouble” – in other words, the lake would reduce the number of criminal acts, large and small.¹²⁵

The SREC pushed the matter as far as a congressional committee hearing in 1948 before the matter was settled and the Corps’ control of the entire project was clear. By the time the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Public Works heard the matter in March, the Corps had gotten past the bidding problems and finalized nearly \$30 million in construction contracts. Around the same time, the Clarks Hill Authority had crafted its version of the project’s history in a write-up that repeated and expanded on the blessings the project would

¹²² “U.S. Army engineers resume work on huge Clarks Hill dam project,” *Public Works News*, May 22, 1947.

¹²³ Mary Carter Winter, “Scheduled completion of Clark Hill dam only 3 months away,” *Augusta Chronicle*, Oct. 28, 1951.

¹²⁴ Minutes of the Clarks Hill Authority, Feb. 6, 1947, in Edgar A. Brown Papers, folder 202, box 15, Clemson.

¹²⁵ “S.C. governor warns that power interests still seek to gain control of Clark Hill,” *Augusta Herald*, Feb. 7, 1947.

bring. For example, the piece mentioned the flood-control potential for Augusta, but also painted a picture of a virtual new frontier that would be opened up downstream of the city, on the lower Savannah. Controlling floodwaters would make some 200,000 acres of land with rich soil along the lower river available for farming for the first time, the authority estimated. Swamps could be drained, and forests that never had been timbered could be opened up for cutting. Land management around the reservoir itself would help the dove and quail populations rebound, and the project therefore would improve recreational hunting. Enhancing the capacity for shipping on the river between Augusta and Savannah would create greater competition with the railroad freight rates that southerners had decried for decades as being unfairly high in their region.¹²⁶

In the authority's view, the reservoir area was a marginal, used-up landscape. The upper river valley was a place where, "mile after mile, covered with patches of broomsedge and cutover timberlands, the red hills roll down to the Savannah River," and where "a few evergreen pines break the monotony of acre on acre of dun colored growth." The image was reminiscent of descriptions in *Tobacco Road*, the unsettling fictional story of rural decay set in the river valley south of Augusta in the early 1930s. The Clarks Hill project would impose a "new progressive order" on the landscape and make it valuable in a different way – as a sprawling basin for storing water, rather than a place to live and farm.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Clarks Hill Authority, "Panorama of Progress," 1-5; also report by Thomas & Hutton Engineers on flood-control benefits of Clarks Hill, in hearing of the Committee on Public Works, U.S. House, March 1-3, 1948, in Edgar A. Brown Papers.

¹²⁷ Clarks Hill Authority, "Panorama of Progress," 1 and 8; and see Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (Savannah, GA: The Beehive Press, 1974).

During the committee hearing, the parties also introduced dueling statements into the record from business people in the reservoir area. H.C. Stewart Jr. of Lincoln County, Ga., was a cotton buyer and fertilizer salesman who said that, in his regular travels around the county, he got the sense that the “large majority” of residents wanted the SREC to build Clarks Hill, not the Corps. He said people were happy with parent company Georgia Power’s service and rates, and wanted the Clarks Hill project to be taxable. Meanwhile, R. Hugh Green, a Ford dealer in Lincolnton, and City Clerk H.W. Moss also claimed to speak for a “large majority” of people in the county, who favored a federal project with no private involvement. Willard Lewis, president of Riverside Mills in Augusta, tended to favor private enterprise, but mainly he seemed to want a sufficient source of electricity for the future, regardless of who provided it. He recounted how local mills had relied on water power to run machinery in the early 1900s, and said that only in the past few years had development of electricity met the need year-round.

Along with the influence of electric utilities like Georgia Power, the Cold War helps explain why the SREC was able to extend the debate for several years. Specifically, it was a context that could add another layer of controversy to questions of public vs. private undertakings. In the 1948 hearing on Clarks Hill, Rep. George Dondero, a Michigan Republican who chaired the committee, said it struck him as “communistic” to take a stand against an undertaking by a private interest, and instead to favor a government project. He asked Edgar Brown if he felt that private enterprise had things all wrong and that only an “all-wise government” could build and operate Clarks Hill. “If you knew my record, you would be the last man to suggest that that is my theory of government,” Brown responded,

adding that his key concern was creating the “yardstick” for power rates through a Corps project at Clarks Hill.¹²⁸

The Cold War context emerged in other moments of the history of Clarks Hill. For example, in appropriations debates in the previous year, some members of Congress had argued that federal hydropower projects in the South should get priority in funding, since that region was the furthest from the Soviet Union. The reasoning was that such sources of electricity would have the greatest protection from a Soviet attack. But for Clarks Hill, that point of discussion was more about when to allocate federal money for building the project, than about justifying the project itself. The deepening chill in U.S.-Soviet relations was more important in the push for the next Corps dam on the Savannah, Hartwell Dam, when proponents like Edgar Brown argued that dam and others envisioned for the Savannah would be critical in meeting the demand for electricity in the event of another “national emergency.”¹²⁹ Finally, the federal project in the Savannah River valley with the most direct connection to the Cold War was the Savannah River Site, the nuclear-bomb facility constructed on the lower river in the early 1950s.

¹²⁸ Hearing of the Committee on Public Works, March 1-3, 1948, in Edgar A. Brown Papers.

¹²⁹ Minutes of the Clarks Hill Authority, Nov. 20, 1947 and Nov. 22, 1948, in Edgar A. Brown Papers, folder 202, box 15.

CHAPTER THREE:

Lasting Connections in a Transformed World

The Reid family first laid claim to the hill above the Savannah River around 1867, when William Marshall Reid constructed the original portion of the family's home there, a two-room cabin to which the family added several rooms over the following decades. They cleared fields for their crops, dug a well off the porch, and put up a barn, smokehouse, privy and other outbuildings. The siblings were born in the house between 1875 and 1892, and they had never lived anywhere else before Clarks Hill Dam was built. Four other children of William and Nancy Jane Reid died as infants and were buried on the property.

The four surviving children never married, and they developed strong emotional and physical connections to the farm and homeplace, which sat at the end of a dirt road in the Double Branches community, a long ten miles from the small county seat of Lincolnton. The community was more closely tied to crossroad settlements of Modoc and Parksville across the river in South Carolina, since it was easier to take a ferry to those places than to go by wagon to Lincolnton. The flow of water helped define Double Branches, as the name referred to two local creeks that drained into Little River, about four miles above Little River's confluence with the Savannah.



Figure 3: The back porch and well of the old Reid Home, Lincoln County, Georgia. Photo Provided by Larry Pinson.

In the early 1950s, as construction on Clarks Hill proceeded and the river's water started to pool over thousands of acres, the Reids went into a paralyzing state of denial that they were being forced off their land, according to a recounting by family member Larry Pinson. Even after the federal government had condemned the land and gained official ownership, and as the water rose noticeably each week, the Reids stayed on their farm. They made no move to pack up several decades' worth of belongings and find a new place to live.¹³⁰

Among people impacted by the acquisition of land for Clarks Hill, the immobility of the Reid siblings was a more extreme response than most. But many of the people did feel

¹³⁰ Pinson, interview.

similar, strong connections to the land they were required to give up, and the money they received did not erase their sense of loss. Those who had used the Savannah, and tributaries like the Little and Broad rivers in Georgia and Little River in South Carolina, for activities like fishing, also lost a meaningful natural element, in the form they had known it. Many had drawn a portion of their identities from the land and river, resources that helped sustain them and shape their sense of what they might expect life to offer them.

The perspectives that emerge from interviews and the written record are complex. Those who did not like seeing their land taken or the river changed often concede that the lake has provided benefits to the larger community. They do not reject the project outright. For those still living, it perhaps is a healthy view, given that there is no going back to the pre-lake reality. They chafe at what they see as an unfair, overly blunt approach by the government; if the project had to be built, the Corps should have done things differently, such as taking less land. If farming as they knew it was on an inescapable decline, many would have preferred to deal with the change on their own terms.

A.L. Bradley wrote to the Corps district office in Savannah in 1951 to state that he and his sister did not want to give up 129 acres in McCormick, S.C., unless “absolutely necessary.” The land was a piece of the legacy they had inherited from their father, J.E. Bradley, a link to family memories, and perhaps a place they visited and hoped to move to in the future. However, Bradley and his sister learned that the Corps had condemned the land eighteen months earlier, and he was politely advised on how to collect the government’s payment for the land. Bradley, superintendent of public schools in nearby Saluda County, no longer owned the land he was inquiring about, but did not know it. To the Corps, it was only

one tract among many hundreds of properties that it needed to run through its system. But Bradley was functioning on a personal level, reacting in part because of a connection he felt to the land.¹³¹

Larry Pinson was nearly thirteen in 1951, and he remembered that year as a time both of excitement and family crisis. Not much happened in rural Lincoln County to break up the monotony of farm chores and school, so it was intriguing for a farm kid like Pinson to see surveyors marking lines for the limits of the lake and crews clearing countless acres of trees, mainly pines that ranged from a few years to several decades old. The Corps ended up clearing even more trees than it wanted to initially, following one of the few organized efforts by citizens during approval and construction of Clarks Hill to get the Corps to change its mind on something. To save money, the Corps had planned steps like selective clearing and topping trees in parts of the lake basin. But residents in Lincoln and other lake-affected counties successfully demanded full clearing at all levels where the water level would fluctuate, arguing that partial clearing would leave hazards for boaters and breeding grounds for mosquitoes.¹³²

¹³¹ File for Tract H-701, J.E. Bradley Estate, Box 8 of 45 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

¹³² "Army engineers agree to clearing policy," *Lincoln Journal*, Aug. 31, 1950; and Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 427-28.

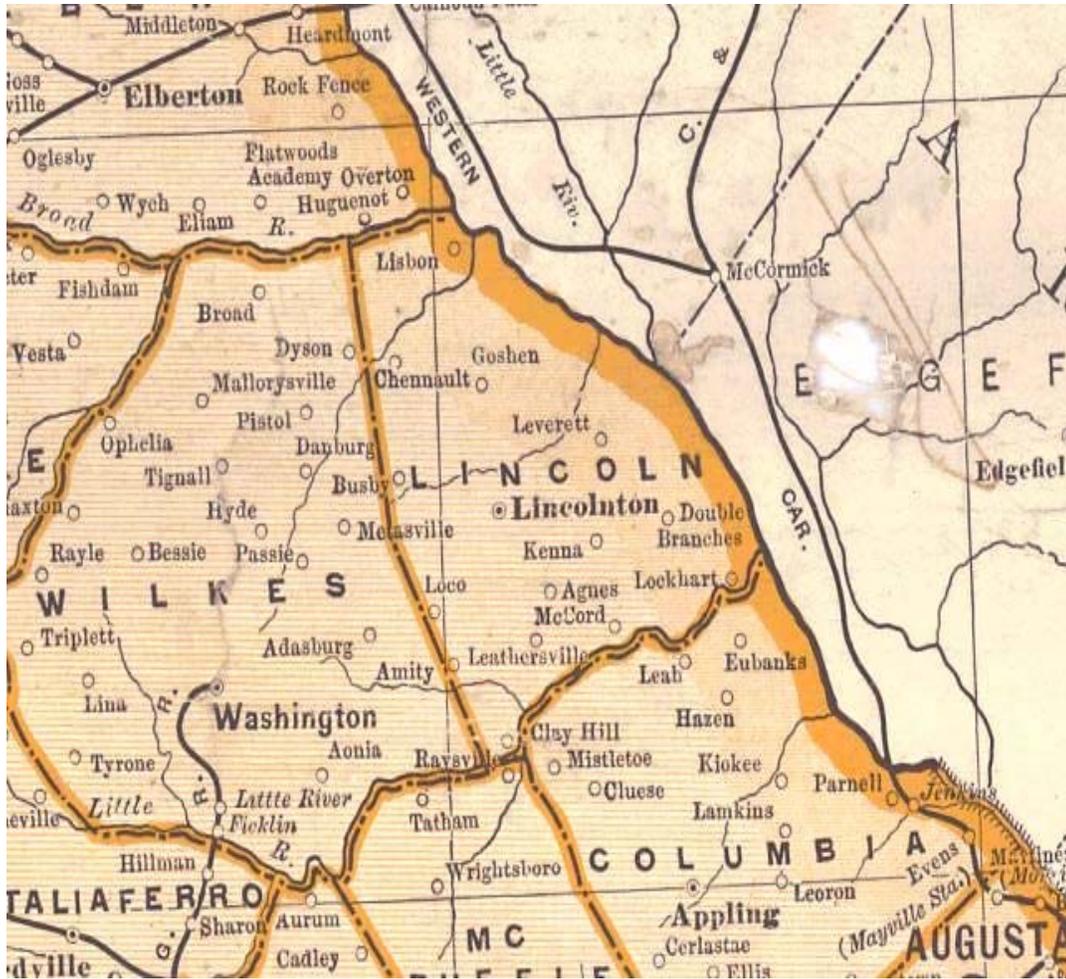


Figure 4: Lincoln County, Ga., and vicinity in 1899, before Clarks Hill Dam. Map at GeorgiaInfo, “Lincoln County 1899,” <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/histcountymaps/lincoln1899map.htm> (accessed June 6, 2009).

When Augusta-based Allstates Constructors, the contractor for the Corps, started work on the dam, the construction workers had to scramble for local housing, and two of them boarded at the Pinson home. Pinson also had two brothers-in-law who found construction jobs on the project. Local families would drive to one of the hilltops above the Little-Savannah confluence with a vista of the dam site, and watch as crews worked in two shifts from 8 a.m. until midnight, excavating and crushing rock, pumping sand from a bar in the

river, welding iron, pouring, curing and cleaning endless sections of concrete, and hundreds of other tasks.¹³³ But excitement over the crews busy clearing trees and building the dam gave way to more serious matters, when the Reids showed no sign of accepting that they had to move. Pinson recalled of the Reids, who were his mother's aunts and uncle:

They just could not bring themselves to believe that ever, water was going to cover [their land] up and they would have to leave... Since they had never lived anywhere else, they just made no move to get out or to find another place to live. Their land had already been taken, it was no longer theirs... They would stand there and look out and say, 'Well, I just don't think it's gonna come on up here.'¹³⁴

Intertwined with their denial was great doubt about the scale and power of the technology at work, in that the Reids found it difficult to believe anyone could build a dam and lake so big that it would reach their hilltop home and turn it into an island. Even in the modern age, the Reids lived in enough isolation in their non-electrified home at the eastern edge of Georgia to doubt that man's technological capacity had grown to that extent. The Savannah had always seemed, in their eyes, to function of its own accord, and it did not seem susceptible to such a drastic manipulation. The more worldly observers of the project, such as writers from Atlanta and elsewhere, also viewed the dam and lake as a challenge to the imagination in their scale. But they tended to be most impressed by the technology at work, rather than by the strength of the river.

The water crept up relentlessly, and time ran out for the Reids. Their relatives and neighbors helped the siblings move just as a nearby creek began to rise and cover the narrow bridge on the road to their house. Word had spread in the community, and people descended

¹³³ Corps of Engineers, field diaries for Clarks Hill, boxes 1-6 of 23, DO950611/76A557, Federal Archives, Morrow, GA; and Pinson, interview.

¹³⁴ Pinson, interview.

on the Reid house to help them move. They carried out the family's possessions in a motley caravan of horse-drawn wagons, pickup trucks, and trailers hitched to farm tractors – the clock and large mirror from the mantel of the main room, the worn rocking chairs they used in front of the fireplace and in the shade of the porch and dogtrot. The Reids moved just a couple of miles into a rental house across from Tankersly's country store, where they had electricity for the first time. Martha Reid died two years later when she was seventy-seven, but Milledge, Sally and Frances lived into the 1970s.



Figure 5: Martha Reid feeding baby chicks outside the Reid Home. Photo provided by Larry Pinson.

Family members had feared they would not live long after the forced move, but in fact they seemed happy for the most part. Nevertheless, the fact that they retained joy in their lives, made peace with the change, and lived at least twenty more years did not mean losing their house and farm was a minor inconvenience. It meant they were resilient in the face of hardship, and they retained the support network that consisted of the many neighbors and extended-family members who had helped them move. The siblings drew strength from the network, a set of connections that helped them replace to a certain extent the broken connection to their land.¹³⁵

Across the river in South Carolina, Bobby Edmonds knew a number of family friends in western McCormick who lost all or part of their land to the project. If they were white, many of the displaced people moved to nearby towns such as Greenwood, Anderson, Calhoun Falls, and Abbeville, S.C., or down in Augusta, often going to work in cotton mills. Some local blacks ended up in those towns as well, but others went north because they were shut out of most of the nearby textiles jobs, according to Edmonds. The Edmonds family lived far enough off the river to avoid any Corps acquisition, but Bobby Edmonds did see the river that he knew as a youth fundamentally altered. His lasting memories highlight both meaningful gain and loss, in connection with the river and later the reservoir.¹³⁶

Edmonds was born in 1932 on the family farm about two miles outside the county seat of McCormick, where his father, Ralph, worked one mule to scrape out a subsistence on fifty-three acres, and where Bobby and his brother and three sisters learned hard work at an early

¹³⁵ Pinson, interview, and e-mail message to author, April 2, 2008.

¹³⁶ Bobby Edmonds, interview by author, Cedar Hill, SC, March 21, 2008.

age. They typically grew about five acres of cotton to bring in cash, and devoted the rest of their hilly land to plants they could eat, grind up for baking, or put up for later – crops like corn, oats, wheat, potatoes, beans, peas, peanuts, and beets, and apple, peach, and pear trees. Their home was a two-room cabin built in the mid-1800s, and the interior wood was exposed until Ralph Edmonds sealed it with pine boards around 1937 and added two rooms. Onie Edmonds did her family's washing on Mondays in a large pot over a fire, and she rinsed out Bobby's one pair of school overalls during the week. Before the farm got electricity around 1950, the family used kerosene lamps for light, when they could afford the kerosene.¹³⁷

Bobby Edmonds went on to work forty-one years for the South Carolina highway department, from which he retired as chief highway-maintenance engineer for McCormick County. He developed many interests and skills along the way, emerging as a hardworking, southern-style Renaissance man. In addition to overseeing his county's road system, he owned and operated a seafood restaurant and a photography studio with his wife. He did print work at the McCormick newspaper, and eventually bought and refurbished buildings in the small downtown. Edmonds raised cattle and steadily accumulated about 376 acres, including the fifty-three acres his parents had owned, and turned the land into a timber farm of loblolly pine. He served on the county school board during racial integration of the schools, and was a board member of the McCormick Soil and Water Conservation District in 2008. Even with this range of experiences, some of his most vivid, cherished memories relate to the simple pleasure of time on the river.

¹³⁷ Edmonds, interview.

The recollections arise easily of the Saturday afternoons he and his father put aside chores and set off to fish and camp along the Savannah. Edmonds walked with his father on the dirt roads to the river, collecting bait along the way in the form of earthworms, Catawba worms, and redhorse minnows from the creeks. At the river, they stretched trot lines with baited hooks across the water and cut slender poles from bamboo cane to use from the bank.

They also fished in the current in a leaky wooden boat that required constant bailing by Edmonds, who recalled, “I’d be dipping out water to keep the doggone thing from sinking, and sometimes, Daddy [would] be fishing just as content as you ever saw. He’d say, ‘Bobby, you’re gonna have to dip a little faster, or we’re gonna sink.’” His father was not a worrier; his mother did most of the worrying. The father and son ate and slept next to the campfire on the bank or on Searles Island, then gathered their gear in the morning as the mists burned off the water, and slowly walked home.¹³⁸

The river in the late 1930s and early 40s was a source of adventure away from the farm routine for Edmonds, and a place for time alone with his father. They also renewed connections with neighbors to whom they talked or offered fish as they trekked to their fishing spot and then back home. On the Saturdays when they went to Little River instead of the Savannah, one of the highlights was stopping at the home of a family they knew.

Edmonds remembers the taste of the watermelons the farmer shared with them:

He raised watermelons, I mean really, really nice watermelons. . . . Daddy’d ask him, “Can we get a watermelon coming back?” And he’d say, “Yeah, help yourself.” Middle of the night, we’d stop by his watermelon patch and break open two watermelons, one apiece, [or] half a watermelon, just eat all we could, and that was so good.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

It was not just about the fishing; the experience was an adventure with his father through the countryside. They had connections to the environment and also to people they encountered along the way. Clarks Hill Dam transformed the river and made it impossible for Edmonds to interact in that specific way with the nonhuman landscape as well as with people, and he cannot re-create the same, particular memories with his own children and grandchildren. He can fish the lake and use the camping areas operated by the Corps or the state governments around the edges of the reservoir. But much of the wildness of the experience is lost – elements like the changing flow of the river during the seasons, and the vestiges of the southern commons that empowered the father and son to pass through both public and private property unimpeded, and to collect their bait from the landscape and remove fish from the river.

Historian Jared Farmer provides a helpful parallel in his study of Glen Canyon Dam, which the federal government completed on the Colorado River in Arizona in 1964. Farmer describes a loss that some felt when the dam submerged a large portion of the canyon lands along the river, in the creation of Lake Powell.¹⁴⁰ The loss had a similar significance to the elimination of Bobby Edmonds's fishing spots, in that a natural feature was altered drastically from the form that people had experienced and valued. A difference is that the banks of the Savannah in McCormick County did not necessarily have the same aesthetic grandeur as the striking, river-carved canyon in Arizona. The banks of the Savannah did not appeal to Edmonds and others so much as a place of great beauty, but as a locale for hands-

¹⁴⁰ See Jared Farmer, *Glen Canyon Dammed: Inventing Lake Powell and the Canyon Country* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).

on interaction with the river and the fish it sustained, and for bonding with fathers or friends. It was a landscape in which they ate and played, not an aesthetic experience.

Edmonds has a neighbor, his elder by about ten years, who served in the U.S. Navy during World War Two and made his career in the military. When this man, Dewey Willis, was away in the service after the war, the Corps acquired his family's entire farm in McCormick County, and it became part of the federally owned band of land around the rim of the lake that was not flooded. The area that included the Willis farm drained into Little River in South Carolina, which ran southwest into the Savannah. While Edmonds was able to build up his land holdings in later years on the foundation of ten acres his father had given him, the same foundation was impossible for Willis after the acquisition.¹⁴¹

According to Edmonds, land agents for the Corps told his neighbor's family in the late-1940s that the agency needed the land for a fish hatchery, although the hatchery was not constructed. Some forty years later, the former Willis property was part of 3,000 acres that the Corps sold after extensive lobbying by a prominent local resident, John McCallister, who had the ear of Strom Thurmond in the U.S. Senate. The idea was to restore that acreage to McCormick's tax rolls – since the federal government was exempt from local taxes – and the land was developed into a lake-oriented community of private, frequently upscale homes. Edmonds observed that Willis, nearly ninety years old in 2008, still visits the site of his old family farm once a week. He does not talk much about it, but every week he travels about two miles down to the site just to sit and look, relying on his imagination. In the late years of

¹⁴¹ The Little River in South Carolina is a separate waterway from Little River in Georgia, although both feed into the Savannah.

his life, Willis finds it important to renew his connection with this particular land and replay the memories of his youth that the land evokes, even if someone else now owns it.¹⁴²

In one sense, Joe M. Holloway Jr. was fortunate, in that his family kept hold of a portion of its land. Holloway was drafted soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, entering the Army in January 1942 at age 21, and it was the spring of 1944 before he was able to come home for a visit to his family's farm in Lincoln County. Holloway spent much of his time in the Army on construction crews in South America and the Caribbean, putting up power and telephone lines around airports, and he left the service in 1946. Holloway's three brothers were drafted and survived the war, while Holloway's wife, Dot, had a brother killed.¹⁴³

About two years after Holloway got out of the Army, the Corps of Engineers acquired roughly 250 acres of the Holloways' land for Clarks Hill, a little more than half of what the family owned, including sixty acres of rich bottomland near the Savannah River where they had raised corn for their dairy cows. The farmland off Double Branches Road had yielded about twenty-five bales of cotton in good years, along with corn and other grains. His father Joe Sr. also owned a country store in the area. They had a relatively sizable farming operation in the 1940s – five mules and eventually two tractors – dependent on the labor of the family and a number of wage laborers, who differed from tenants in that the Holloways fed them each day and paid them about \$10 each month; they typically were young men who did not yet have wives and families.¹⁴⁴ Holloway had five sisters as well, so between nine

¹⁴² The housing development is called Savannah Lakes Village; the story of the neighbor going to visit his family's former property each week is from the Edmonds interview.

¹⁴³ Holloway, interview.

¹⁴⁴ For descriptions of types of farmers and farm laborers, see Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 94, and Arthur F.

children and several farm workers, his mother, Lillian, faced a daily challenge in feeding them all. Some wage hands were white and lived on occasion in the family's home, but most were black and did not have the option of boarding in the house.

Holloway's father had put him in charge of the farming operation several years before he went into the Army, or as Holloway puts it, "He turned that farm over to me from chap up." He set the work pace for the wage hands, whether it was picking the twenty-five acres of cotton or plowing the other acreage for corn and wheat. But when Holloway came home after the war, he was ready for a change. He had sent home nearly \$5,000 during four years in the Army, and he was dismayed to learn that none of his nest egg remained. He set his mind on working for himself and saved another \$2,000 to buy a truck for hauling pulpwood in 1947.

Holloway left farming but he still extracted his living from the land, steering his truck deep into the piney woods around the Savannah and Little rivers, cutting trees and trucking them to McCormick, for rail shipment to a Champion Paper mill across the state line in Canton, N.C. It was while he built up this pulpwood business that the Corps acquired part of the family farm, and because he had purchased two more trucks and hired some men by 1950, Holloway ironically was in a good position to earn money when the Corps started clearing trees for Clarks Hill. Essentially as a subcontractor for the Corps, he and his crew cut and hauled the pines within the white line that Corps surveyors had marked. It was the same clearing process that Larry Pinson had witnessed as a teenager.

Later, Holloway cut and hauled pulpwood from the basin of Hartwell Lake, which the Corps built upriver on the Savannah in the late fifties. He also worked for a while hauling

Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 21 and 147-49.

loads of large rocks to the river below Augusta, to be used as rip-rap in the navigation channel of the river. He remained a contractor and therefore his own boss, to a degree, over these years. But in the 1960s, he needed steady work and took a job with Champion Paper, cutting pines on the company's sprawling lands in neighboring Wilkes County. He worked there twelve years, then hauled wood chips for a time to a factory in Augusta that burned the chips as fuel, and finally retired to tend cattle on his land in Double Branches.¹⁴⁵

Holloway lives on land that includes a portion of his family's farm. Along with losing land to Clarks Hill, the family apparently had to sell more of the land to settle debts after Joe Sr. died, but Holloway built the holdings back up to about 200 acres over the years. Sitting on his back porch, approaching age 90, Holloway perceives the world as largely within the sweep of his hand. Most places he describes are "just down the road here," or "right up there," or "over yonder." The boundaries reach a few miles to places like Lincolnton or McCormick, but not much further. He has restored a measure of order in his mind on a landscape that Clarks Hill rearranged.

But he can recount land and features lost to the lake, like the dairy farm and 100 pecan trees lost by one nearby resident, the timber and farmland on the Dunn place, a part of Dr. Lane's farm and the building where the doctor used to see patients. "You could go down this old road here [and see] the prettiest homes you'd want to see," he recalls. "And all of them got gone. It's no telling how many houses were down in the forks of Little River and the big river." The Holloway land acquired for the lake included a barn, which was demolished. The Corps typically tore down such structures once it controlled property, although the former

¹⁴⁵ Holloway, interview.

owners could buy back the buildings and salvage materials like the wood and metal roofing. The Corps set a salvage value, such as \$50 for a small farm house, and the former owner could have that amount subtracted from the payment the Corps gave them.¹⁴⁶

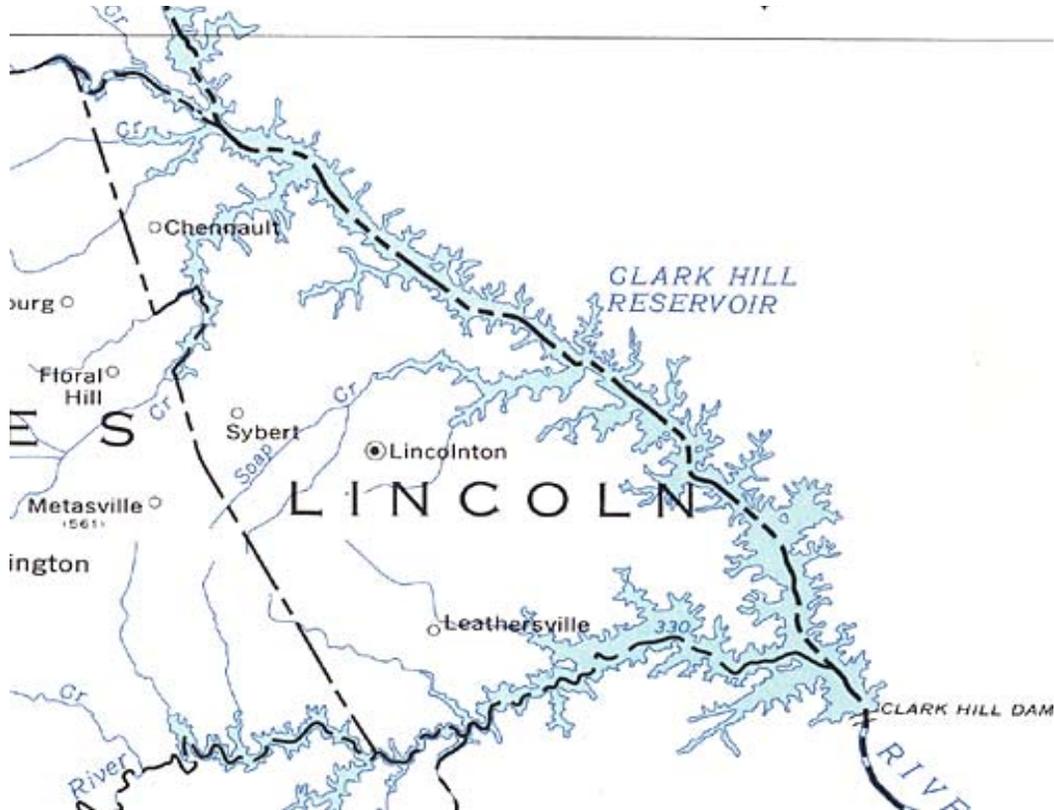


Figure 6: Lincoln County, Ga., in 1970, after construction of Clarks Hill Dam. Map at GeorgiaInfo, “Lincoln County, 1970,” <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/histcountymaps/lincoln1970map.htm> (accessed June 6, 2009).

¹⁴⁶ Quote from Holloway interview; the option for former owners to salvage materials from homes and outbuildings is evident in the property acquisition files of the Corps.

It bothered Holloway, to begin with, that the federal government took half the family farm. Although he was working away from the farm, the land still was a portion of the source of his family's livelihood, and also an element of their identity and means of grounding in the community. It seemed fundamentally wrong to Holloway that the Corps could take the land. He knew how difficult it could be for people like his father to acquire land in the first place, remembering the times he went with his father to a bank in Lincolnton where he had to mortgage all his farm animals and equipment just to secure a small loan.

He also saw unfairness in the prices paid for the land, and in the fact that the Corps acquired so much land beyond the high-water line. For example, roughly half of the former Holloway land was above that line. He contends the change would have been much easier to swallow if the government had acquired just a narrow band of land around the lake. The Corps did sell off a significant amount of the federal land beyond the water's edge after declaring it "excess" in the late fifties and early sixties, and that land apparently included a portion of the former Holloway property. By Holloway's recollection, the former owners could buy back the land but had to pay interest of 6 percent, which meant the land for which his family had been paid \$24 to \$30 an acre, went for at least \$100 an acre and was out of reach for him.¹⁴⁷

As it was for Bobby Edmonds, the river itself was an important arena of escape and adventure for Holloway – an arena that no longer exists. It also was a source of income for Holloway as a boy, as he spent several years trapping muskrats and minks along the river and selling their pelts for relatively good money. In terms of fun, he calls up an image from the

¹⁴⁷ Holloway, interview.

1930s of a handful of Georgia farm boys, happily standing “naked as jaybirds” in the river while holding a large seine in the current to catch fish. They fished naked partly to be free of their sweaty farm clothes and to feel the cool water in summertime, and probably because they had only one or two sets of clothes for the week. They could find enough isolation in those times that they usually did not have to worry about startling anyone. “It meant a lot to me, the river,” Holloway says. “I looked forward to it. I couldn’t hardly wait to get down there.” Catfish were their main quarry, which the boys would turn over to a black tenant farmer who often went with them and did the cooking, to share in the catch and also in the river experience.¹⁴⁸

A sense of loss and mistreatment carried over well into the next generation for a branch of the Fortson family in Lincoln County, which lost a large portion of its active farm along the Savannah to Clarks Hill Dam. Born in 1951, Ben Fortson was just a toddler when the project was built, and the particular stretch of the Savannah River that people like Joe Holloway and Bobby Edmonds had enjoyed was gone. But Fortson grew up hearing stories about his family’s experiences with the project and the government.

The Corps acquired more than 1,000 acres of the Fortson family’s land in the northern end of the county, leaving the family with about 330 acres, including the ancestral home. Fortson’s grandfather and great-grandfather had owned much of the land as well, and his father, James Fortson, was raising cotton, cattle, timber, corn and other crops there at the time of acquisition. James Fortson contended the loss of land essentially put him out of farming, and he took the matter to court in pursuit of a better price for the land. He lost the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

case, and told his son that he was paid a dollar an acre for the acreage that the lake would cover, and \$24 an acre for the land above the water line.¹⁴⁹

The extended Fortson family had found both gain and loss in the Savannah River, and later the lake. Ben Fortson is named for his grandfather, who farmed but also owned a ferry business that relied on the river to transport people and vehicles between Lincoln and McCormick counties. Some of the ferries along the upper Savannah had begun using gasoline engines to cross the river by the 1930s, but Fortson's Ferry still ran on the force of the current, via a rudder and cable. In February 1937, the river was swollen from steady rains. A man named Curry Murray, who worked for Fortson on the ferry, fell into the river while trying to fetch his hat from the water, and Fortson went in after him. Murray drowned, and Fortson died during the effort to save Murray, likely due to a heart attack.¹⁵⁰

After the family lost about three-fourths of its farm, and the reservoir filled up, the younger Ben Fortson spent much of his childhood on and around the lake, boating, skiing, fishing, hunting, even scuba-diving. He loved the lake as much as anything in his life. When it warmed up in the spring, he practically lived on the water. In addition, the state of Georgia built Elijah Clark State Park on part of the Fortsons' former land not long after the lake was finished, and James Fortson became superintendent of the park for many years.

Georgia officials, who worked with the Corps in creating the state park, probably were trying to compensate the family for its loss of land by giving the elder Fortson the job as superintendent, and the Fortsons made the best of the situation. "He really poured his heart and soul into [the park], and I think one reason was because he always still identified that

¹⁴⁹ W. Benjamin Fortson, interview by author, Lincolnton, GA, March 22, 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Fortson and Edmonds, interviews; and Edmonds, *McCormick County: Land of Cotton*, 265-66.

land as being his land,” Ben Fortson said. “That’s one reason why he put so much of himself into building that place.” Nevertheless, the family felt wronged to a significant degree by what happened and by the approach the Corps took, such as downplaying the value of the farmland and timbered acreage that it took.¹⁵¹

As a young adult, Fortson spoke out in public hearings in the 1970s against plans by the Corps for another hydropower dam and reservoir upriver of Clarks Hill, known first as Trotters Shoals and later named Richard B. Russell Lake. Fortson said he protested in part because he did not like what happened with his family’s property and did not want other landowners upriver to go through the same experience. It also has been galling to him to see land for which the Corps paid low prices, including part of the Fortson land, sold at much greater values in recent times, as lots for lake-oriented homes. If the family had retained even a small bit of its land along the area that became lakefront property, family members could have been the ones either to build houses there or benefit financially from developing it.¹⁵²

Fortson interprets the acquisition on a number of levels. It meant that his father and family no longer could rely on farming as their primary source of income, disrupting a way of life that went back at least two generations. The loss changed the nature of the 1,500-acre piece of Lincoln County where the family had its roots and a share of its identity. Fortson also thinks about the experience in terms of how the Corps proceeded, and he inherited his perception in part from his father. “I’m not sure my father was bitter,” he says. “You could tell he didn’t like it. He didn’t want to give [the land] up, and I guess there was some resentment there. A lot of it was how it happened.” The aspects of the process that seemed

¹⁵¹ Fortson, interview.

¹⁵² Ibid.

most unfair to James Fortson, and later to his son, were the fact that the Corps took such a large portion of their land without any real consideration, in their view, of the impacts. It seemed random, abrupt, and unnecessary. Receiving payment for the land was not a consolation because they had not been looking to sell it.¹⁵³



Figure 7: Elijah Clark State Park, Ga., where James Fortson was superintendent. Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 429.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

The younger Fortson remembers going with his father in the mid-fifties to truck their cotton to a gin in nearby Plum Branch, S.C., so the farming operation did continue at least for a few years after the lake. But his father said that, after the land acquisition, the farm was not a viable, primary enterprise for the family. Joe Holloway Jr. has a similar understanding from his father, saying the loss of land put him out of farming as a main livelihood. James Fortson turned to his superintendent's job at the state park, and Joe Holloway Sr. relied increasingly on his country store.

Looking back on this time period, we know that agriculture in the South was in the midst of fundamental changes and steady decline. Southern agriculture experienced a major transformation in particular between 1920 and 1960, as historian Jack Temple Kirby has depicted. The most intense time of change was during the middle decades of that time period – the same years when the Corps was assessing the prospects for Clarks Hill and then starting to acquire land. The boll weevil, erosion and depletion of the soil, the Depression, the New Deal's farm programs, and the allure of industrial jobs during World War Two all helped push black and white southerners from farms in the countryside and draw them to the cities of the South, or to jobs in cities outside the region.

By 1960, some nine million southerners had moved out of the region entirely, while millions of others had settled in southern cities and towns. As Kirby writes in *Rural Worlds Lost*, "Sharecroppers and mules had become rare, and southern farms and rural communities, both now vastly reduced in numbers and souls, more closely resembled those of the North

and West than the prewar South.”¹⁵⁴ The broad pattern of change that Kirby describes was true for the Georgia and South Carolina piedmont regions that included the Savannah River valley and counties like Lincoln and McCormick. They were the kind of fading rural worlds that Kirby portrays.

A sense of decline permeates many of the appraisals the Corps made of the properties it acquired. In McCormick County, J.R. Freeman had purchased twenty-three acres along Swift Creek in 1935, including a farmhouse and several outbuildings. When an agent for the Corps described the land in 1948, a tenant named Herbert Wiggleton was living there and raising corn and other food crops on just a few acres, while Freeman and his wife lived in Columbia. The agent noted the house was old and unpainted, with no electricity or indoor plumbing, and Wiggleton got his water from a spring. Pines had grown up on about half the land. Both the house and land were “poor,” according to the agent, while the barn and other outbuildings were poor to very poor. He figured the value of the house at \$450 and total value at \$985, located in what he judged a “neighborhood of mostly low income colored and white farmers.” The agent took photographs that matched his description of the property.¹⁵⁵

But the property had a noteworthy quality, in that its owner, J.R. Freeman, was black. He had purchased it from a white man, J.W. Fowler, and the historical record of land ownership in the South suggests he faced greater obstacles in acquiring the land than some whites. Studying nearby Greene County, Ga., sociologist Arthur Raper observed that black farmers in the black-belt piedmont had to navigate a precarious and “highly selective” procedure to

¹⁵⁴ Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), xiv-xv and 51-68; also see Schulman, *Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 82.

¹⁵⁵ Acquisition file for Tract F-585 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

buy land in the early twentieth century. Such prospective black owners had to “be acceptable to the white community, have a white sponsor, be content with the purchase of acreage least desired by the whites, and pay for it in a very few years,” Raper reported.¹⁵⁶ It is difficult to know exactly what J.R. Freeman went through to obtain the acreage in McCormick, but a struggle to buy the land could have given him a unique connection to it, and a desire to pass it on to his family or otherwise keep it in black hands.

Numerous scholars have traced the decline in southern farming on economic, political, and social levels. Sixty years later, therefore, we can justifiably doubt that losing land for Clarks Hill truly put farmers out of business, because we suspect it was just a matter of time before the plowing and harvesting came to an end. Losing productive farmland might have speeded up the process for some, but larger economic forces were at work. And southern families like the Fortsons and Holloways surely were not blind to the decline of agriculture, from their own experience and those of farmers in the larger community. In McCormick, Bobby Edmonds’s father had started work in 1946 at Self Mills in Greenwood, S.C., and Edmonds saw his brother and most of his high-school classmates leave the county to find work outside of farming.¹⁵⁷

But they could not know what historians now see clearly, so one can understand why people such as James Fortson would blame the lake for their farming operation’s demise. In addition, the Fortson and Holloway farms were larger than the subsistence farms of 50-100 acres where so many owners and tenants had struggled to feed their families and have more than a minimal existence. With their larger holdings, their chances arguably were better of

¹⁵⁶ Raper, *Preface to Peasantry*, 122.

¹⁵⁷ Edmonds, interview.

adapting and carrying on in farming in some form, if the lake had not claimed a significant swath of their land. They might have been able to decide, more on their own terms, when and if to part with land from which they had drawn income along with a measure of their identity.

The question arises, if people felt connections to their land beyond its economic potential and had meaningful experiences with the river, why did they not come together in some way to resist Clarks Hill? The clear legal authority of the federal government to take the land, with compensation, was a primary reason. But the answer, which the following chapter considers, also likely lies in events of the time, and the qualities of both the project and the affected people.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Negotiating the Edges of Federal Power

In February 1946, the Corps leased space in the small Lincoln downtown for its new Clarks Hill land office, and brought in an out-of-towner, Ethan E. Allen of Memphis, Tennessee, as supervisor. At the time, Allen said it would take a little while for the federal government to set up its office in the New Lincoln Hotel building and start acquiring land. But once the process began, he figured, it would run for roughly three years. The acquisitions would prove to be more complex than Allen perhaps envisioned, with some condemnation cases dragging into the 1960s, long after the project began generating electricity and drawing recreational users to its waters and shore. Still, Allen set in motion a bureaucracy that, in the long run, would not be denied.¹⁵⁸

In the memory of Bobby Edmonds of McCormick, S.C., the primary response of the people whose land was acquired was acceptance, with mixed feelings. In broad terms, that mix included a sense for some that the lake could be a good thing for the region, and a willingness to make a sacrifice toward that end. An element of sacrifice for the country also was at work, in that World War Two began and ended during the approval process for Clarks Hill, and people in Lincoln and other lake counties experienced their share of the patriotic demands of the war, from sending their citizens into the armed forces to dealing with rationing. The Candler and Bailey families, for example, each sent four sons from Lincoln into the service in 1942, and the Murrays and Mays each sent three sons. The responsibility

¹⁵⁸ "Land office being set up here in connection with Clark Hill project," *Lincoln Journal*, Feb. 14, 1946.

of the War Department for Clarks Hill, through the Corps, carried an undercurrent of national need, even if factors like national defense were not explicit in arguments for Clarks Hill.¹⁵⁹

Even before Clarks Hill, owners of significant acreage along the Savannah apparently had sold land or options on it. In fact, the Savannah River Electric Company reported that it controlled about 40,000 acres around the site where Clarks Hill would be built, likely a combination of land purchases that the company had completed, and options to buy land for which it paid the owners. Within the land controlled by the SREC were several thousand acres that yet another dam-minded entity had acquired starting in 1901. That entity, the Twin City Power Company, actually had received initial approvals from Congress and the Federal Power Commission by 1926 to build a hydropower dam near Clarks Hill. But when the SREC entered the scene, the companies apparently agreed that the SREC would subsume the Twin City-controlled land within its larger holdings. The federal government ultimately acquired all the SREC and Twin City land, although condemnation cases for some of that acreage lasted several years.¹⁶⁰

Twin City and the SREC, as private corporations, presumably could not condemn land. Therefore, at some point, the owners of those 40,000 acres had become willing sellers, for a variety of possible reasons, from a simple desire to have the money rather than the land, to economic hard times that left the owners little choice. It is reasonable to assume that the

¹⁵⁹ “Two families in Lincoln County Have four sons each in service,” *Lincoln Journal*, Aug. 9, 1942.

¹⁶⁰ Filings in U.S. District Court in Augusta, *United States of America v. 10,848.42 acres in Columbia, Lincoln, McDuffie, Warren, Wilkes, and M.G. and J.J. Dorn Inc., et al.*, July 18, 1950, copies of court records in author’s possession; also see “*United States of America v. Twin City Power Company of Georgia et al.*,” <http://cases.justia.com/us-court-of-appeals/F2/221/299/273874/> and “*United States of America v. Twin City Power Company of Georgia and William P. Dauchy, its Mortgagee, appellees*,” <http://cases.justia.com/us-court-of-appeals/F2/215/592/55375/> (both accessed June 3, 2009).

Corps also found a certain number of willing sellers, by the time it focused on land acquisitions in the 1940s.

There also were people like Kathleen Beggs, who remembered being happy that her family was relocated, after the government acquired the farm near Little River in Lincoln County on which she and her husband, Claude, lived with his parents. In 1947, when they moved off the Beggs place, Kathleen and Claude had been married five years and had three young children. After looking for a new place for more than a year, they bought a house and farm acreage about five miles away in the Double Branches community.¹⁶¹

Beggs was pleased with the move because it put her closer to town, and also shortened the school-bus ride for her children. The Beggs farm had belonged to her husband's family, and she recalled that Claude Beggs and his parents did not seem overly troubled to lose the farm and see it flooded. They had built a new barn and essentially transferred their dairy operation to the Double Branches property. A black couple named Felton and Mamie Leverette, who worked on the Beggs farm, moved to the new property with the Beggs, who were white. In several regards, the family had recreated much of their former life on the new place. The fact that Kathleen and Claude already knew many people in Double Branches helped them adjust as well. Claude Beggs continued farming for several years, but eventually he made it a secondary occupation and commuted to Augusta to work at Fort Gordon for nearly thirty years – therefore earning much of his living from a federal installation. Claude

¹⁶¹ Kathleen Beggs, interview with author, Double Branches, GA, Nov. 4, 2008.

died in 2005, and Kathleen continued to live on a portion of the property three years later, not far from Joe Holloway Jr. and Larry Pinson.¹⁶²

For Kathleen Beggs, the old Beggs farm was not her family's homeplace and locus of her childhood. Born in 1921, Kathleen was a McGill, and she grew up about ten miles to the west on a thriving, 800-acre farm. The McGills raised everything from barley to hogs, peaches to sugar cane, and the family owned another 1,000 acres or so just to the north, as well as a sawmill operation. The government did not acquire any of the McGills' land for the lake, a fact that might have tempered her reaction to the land acquisition process, and shaped her perception of the reactions of her husband's family.

And while Kathleen and the Beggs family handled the transition in their way, it was more traumatic for some of her neighbors. By her count, about thirty families from the area near Little River had to relocate, and some fretted a great deal both about the new homes they were seeking, and those they left behind. "The people were very distressed, because so many had to find places," Beggs recalled. "It took a long time to find [a new place], because people that had land wanted to hold to the land. I don't remember my daddy ever selling any land." The Fleming family struggled with letting go of their farm after the Corps acquired it. Their land had been adjacent to the Beggs farm, and the Flemings drove down to see their former house and land a number of times, right up until the lake began to cover the property.¹⁶³

Reactions to the land acquisition such as anger, disbelief, or sadness were part of the mix of feelings in the lake area. The ability of the SREC to amass about 40,000 acres without the power of eminent domain was strong evidence that many owners, for a range of reasons, had

¹⁶² Beggs, interview.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

been ready to part with their land in the years before Clarks Hill. But the Corps acquired another 100,000 acres beyond that amount. Even if the government found a number of willing sellers, a counter-interpretation is that owners who had not already sold out to the SREC were especially interested in keeping their land. The 40,000 acres perhaps were not the tip of the iceberg of willing sellers, but were nearly the entire mass.

“It was a bittersweet thing,” Bobby Edmonds said about his McCormick neighbors and others in the region affected by the reservoir. Some surely felt it was a blessing to receive much-needed cash for their land. On the other hand, Edmonds judged, “If this thing should happen today, [it] would be wide open. You’d have a lot of demonstration. But people in that day did not. They did not have that option. The people just accepted it. The government’s taking the land. We have to go.”¹⁶⁴

Edmonds is a sharp observer, and his memories draw on eight decades of living in McCormick as well as extensive research for the several books of local history he has written. When he stated that people in the late 1940s did not have the option of seriously fighting the land acquisition, what exactly did he mean? After all, landowners and residents directly impacted by the acquisitions theoretically could have banded together and tried to get local and state officials on their side against the project, or at least given officials pause in weighing the dam’s potential benefits against the costs. For whites, and to a significantly lesser degree African-Americans, the arenas of democratic protest were available, such as public hearings, the offices of elected representatives, and the court system.

¹⁶⁴ Edmonds, interview.

In part, Edmonds meant that many of the affected people who might have wanted to protest the project did not have the resources to do so. Many were busy trying to raise enough grain, meat, and vegetables to feed themselves and their farm animals, along with cotton to generate a little cash and chickens to produce eggs for bartering at the country store for products like coffee and tobacco. Finding the time and money for waging an organized legal battle or even consistently speaking out in a unified way would have been a stretch.

Edmonds also conveyed a sense of the power of the federal government, whose role had grown a great deal in the first half of the twentieth century through President Roosevelt's response to the Great Depression, and then the fighting of the second global war. When Edmonds said people did not have the option to fight Clarks Hill, he meant that they realized the federal government's power and saw no chance of winning. That overall authority played a significant role in the "acceptance" he remembered.

In the many stories Edmonds has heard in talking to community members over the years, federal land agents sometimes proved willing to make promises that did not always come to fruition. That included the promise of electricity. Edmonds had earned money in the 1950s installing the first wiring and lights in homes around McCormick once the Rural Electrification Administration helped subsidize the extension of electricity to the area. He recalled that, during the Clarks Hill land acquisition, "The real-estate assessors, or whatever they were, would tell [owners] anything to try to pacify the person they were taking it from. And also, they said, 'We're gonna generate electric power and you people will get power

dirt-cheap. You'll get power in your homes right way.' Well, that didn't happen. The only way we got power in the countryside here was through the (REA) process.”¹⁶⁵

The criticism was not entirely fair to the Corps. After all, the REA did not generate its own electricity. Power from Clarks Hill likely made up at least a portion of the power that REA-backed rural electrical cooperatives distributed to places like McCormick. Perhaps the residents who told such stories were chagrined they did not do more to challenge what the Corps offered for land, or to protest the project, and casting land agents as duplicitous eased some of their regrets. But it does seem likely that federal agents had experience and skill in emphasizing any benefits that a landowner might hope to realize. In their position, one would not really expect them to do otherwise. Without judging their sincerity, the relevant point is that the approach of government representatives who interacted with landowners and residents might well have blunted a measure of the potential protests.

Certainly, how the Corps went about acquiring the land and its attitude toward the owners and residents shaped how those people felt about their experiences. Arthur E. Morgan wrote a well-known, scathing critique of the Corps in 1971 that argued the agency needed a great deal of improvement in how it dealt with the people displaced by engineering projects such as dams. A primary example for Morgan was Garrison Dam in North Dakota, which Congress authorized in 1944 – in the same Flood Control Act that included Clarks Hill. Garrison Dam displaced about 1,544 people in 349 families, members of the Affiliated Tribes who had to move from the river bottomlands they loved to “treeless, waterless, relatively barren prairie,” according to Morgan. He contended that the Garrison project was

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

one of many in which the Corps proved to be “deficient in human sensitivity” when it came to understanding its impacts on people’s lives.¹⁶⁶

Morgan was an intriguing critic of the Corps, in that he was a professional engineer and the first chairman of the TVA. His major bone of contention was with some of the engineering strategies and cost-benefit analytical methods of the Corps. But also took the agency to task for what he viewed as shabby, exploitative treatment of people in the path of engineering works. “This aspect of human relations may seem petty in relation to a multi-million dollar project but it can be extremely important to the individuals involved,” Morgan observed. He saw a pattern of “broken promises” that warranted more public concern.¹⁶⁷

Morgan was not an unbiased observer. Part of his intent was to portray the TVA as much more enlightened in dealing with landowners than the Corps. He claimed that, under his leadership, the TVA made sure it was “consistently concerned with the personal circumstances of persons whose land was being taken,” and that because of the information and other help provided by the federal government, the majority of people displaced by the TVA ended up in a better situation.¹⁶⁸ But even taking Morgan’s criticisms with a grain of salt, if he was on-target in describing a “pattern” of insensitivity by the Corps in the 1940s, then the pattern likely also surfaced at Clarks Hill to some extent, shaping the experiences and reactions of the impacted people.

It does not appear local people organized in any significant way to fight Clarks Hill before it was approved and after the Corps began claiming the land. They did not, for

¹⁶⁶ Arthur E. Morgan, *Dams and Other Disasters: A Century of the Army Corps of Engineers in Civil Works* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1971), 40-41 and 51.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

example, go the route that residents in the Cane Creek watershed in western Orange County, North Carolina, took in the 1970s and 1980s. Faced with plans by the Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) to build a reservoir of several hundred acres on Cane Creek, a number of dairy farmers and other residents in the watershed incorporated a community association, wrote regular newsletters, held fundraisers, and challenged the condemnation power of the water authority.

In 1976, the Cane Creek association identified ten key reasons it was fighting the reservoir. They ranged from particular concerns about possible regulations on farming practices to protect water quality in the reservoir, to fear of a drastic change in the very nature of the community, about fifteen miles west of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They correctly identified the growing water demand from the university and towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro as the driving force behind the reservoir plans. “It seems to us we are being asked to sacrifice our land and our future for Chapel Hill before Chapel Hill officials have made a serious effort to develop alternative solutions to their citizens’ water problems,” the association’s officers wrote. They added a tagline that was both a serious plea and a nugget of bumper-sticker humor: “Drink Milk, Not Water – Save Cane Creek Dairies.”¹⁶⁹

A consultant for OWASA estimated in 1977 that the project would require about 700 acres, currently in the hands of two dozen landowners, including three active dairy farmers. About 450 acres would be flooded, including the sites of two occupied residences and several

¹⁶⁹ Newsletter of the Cane Creek Conservation Authority, Nov. 18, 1976, folder k-i, Box 123, No. 4007, Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

outbuildings. Most of the outbuildings reportedly were not unique and were in “various stages of neglect and disrepair.” The consultant also downplayed the impacts on humans, and argued that, in general, the nature of the Cane Creek community was “already changing and the change in community cohesion and lifestyle will continue with or without the project,” a point meant to refute one of the association’s central arguments.¹⁷⁰

It was true that, by the late 1970s, fewer people farmed in Orange County, or at least they relied on non-farming jobs as a piece of the family’s financial puzzle. The countryside was attractive to new residents who could commute to employment centers such as the university, so the demographics were changing, as the consultant suggested. But longtime residents were not ready to see a transformation as inevitable. They expressed fear that an “influx of urban-oriented country dwellers” would ruin the community:

There is a new generation of young dairymen at Cane Creek who want to spend their lives running a dairy. The farmers want to continue farming. The non-farmers among us – teachers, factory workers, mailmen, nurses, doctors, lawyers, mechanics, butchers – want to continue to live and raise our children in a beautiful rural setting where the people feel a deep sense of community with one another, where the generations live together in harmony, where the air is pure and there is room to roam... The reservoir is a threat, not just to the land it will flood, but to the whole community.¹⁷¹

Remembering that the residents were engaged in a political and legal effort, one can find a certain amount of exaggeration in their words. But the Cane Creek residents made a compelling statement of their values and hopes, even if they did not as effectively show how the reservoir directly threatened those things they cherished in such a sweeping way. The water authority prevailed and built Cane Creek Reservoir in the mid-1980s. But the residents

¹⁷⁰ Environmental Impact Assessment, November 1977, folder k-i, Box 123, SOHP, UNC-Chapel Hill.

¹⁷¹ Cane Creek Conservation Association position paper, 1977, folder k-i, Box 123, SOHP.

strengthened the community they feared would evaporate by making their feelings known and coming together for meetings and events to raise money.

They made vigorous public comments, such as the words of Sam Crawford at a hearing in 1980, who positioned the residents as mistreated underdogs. Officials had never considered the Cane Creek residents important enough to allow them a true voice in the reservoir debate, Crawford argued. Instead, he added, “We have been relegated to a position of being thought of as troublesome but essentially harmless people who shouldn’t be messing around in matters that were the concern of experts.”¹⁷²

Cane Creek was not Clarks Hill. The scale of the proposed reservoir in North Carolina was much smaller, which meant the affected community was more localized. That facilitated communication and concerted action. Also, Cane Creek was thirty years later, and the government agency involved was a local water authority that had been established fairly recently. Those factors help explain why Cane Creek residents were able to come together and why they felt that an organized protest could be effective.

But the Cane Creek example does suggest avenues for thinking about why people affected by Clarks Hill responded as they did. At Clarks Hill, the chief actor was the federal government rather than a county water authority, and the project impacted about two-hundred times the acreage. The residents were spread out over several counties and two states. The project was approved during World War Two and built over the next decade, whereas Cane Creek was proposed in the aftermath of events such as the Civil Rights Movement, protests against the Vietnam War and the beginnings of environmental activism.

¹⁷² Comments by Sam Crawford from a hearing on Sept. 4, 1980, folder k-vii, Box 124, SOHP.

As Bobby Edmonds suggested, the protests likely would have been “wide open” if Clarks Hill had been proposed in more modern times. But challenging the federal government in the 1940s, on a project with the scope of Clarks Hill, would have been a daunting prospect.

Melissa Walker makes an argument in *Southern Farmers and Their Stories* about the mentalities of rural inhabitants in the South that could help explain why people in the Clarks Hill area who wanted to keep their land did not make a joint push. Walker studied nearly five-hundred oral history interviews with southern farmers. She writes primarily about how they dealt with and remembered the same massive changes in southern agriculture between 1920 and 1960 that Jack Temple Kirby details in *Rural Worlds Lost*.

One of Walker’s questions is why small farmers in the South did not organize effectively after World War Two to resist the trend toward farming on a much larger and mechanized scale. She points to the “intense individualism” of twentieth-century family farmers as a central reason. Citing anthropologist Kathryn Marie Dudley in part, Walker says that, “in short, family farmers’ commitment to independence comes at the expense of social solidarity and the ability to organize to pursue a common cause.”¹⁷³ The people around Clarks Hill felt strong connections to their communities, and a sense of being part of a larger group, but an independent streak like that described by Walker ran through them as well. It shows up in the testimonies of Kathleen Beggs and others, in the image of farms as largely self-contained units in which families were accustomed to meeting many basic needs, such as food, on their own. Certainly, farmers assisted other farmers, and when someone was in trouble in a place

¹⁷³ Melissa Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories: Memory and Meaning in Oral History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 227-230.

like Double Branches, other community members often tried to help them out of the jam. But the drive to take care of one's own business also was intense and ingrained for many.

Walker extracts another trend from her reading of oral histories that relates to the decline in southern agriculture. She observes that, as they shrank in number, smaller-scale farmers perceived a drop in their power to “pressure elected officials on their own behalf.”¹⁷⁴ They did not feel the same level of influence as in the past. In the Clarks Hill area, such a perception perhaps cut into the confidence of some landowners that they had enough strength in numbers to impact the land acquisitions.

The people were not devoid of all ability to speak up, as citizens in the lake area did organize around two issues and successfully push the Corps to change its intended course: They convinced the Corps to retain a highway crossing over Little River, rather than abandon it to the rising lake and re-route the highway; and they persuaded the agency to do more extensive tree-clearing. But the mix of involved citizens included not just farmers, but also townspeople who played an important role in those efforts. In both instances, citizens were challenging the Corps on relatively minor – though locally important – details of the dam project, not on the merits of the project itself.

Price's Bridge carried Ga. Highway 47 across Little River, roughly five miles upstream of the Savannah. It was the most direct connection between small-town Lincolnton and the much larger business center of Augusta, what Lincoln County locals knew and valued as their “short route” down to Augusta. Near Little River, John Price once had owned a thriving general store, a cotton gin, and a river-powered mill for grinding corn and wheat. He built the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

initial bridge, possibly in the late 19th century, to provide better access for customers south of Little River to his small commercial dominion.

As the Corps refined its plans for Clarks Hill Dam in 1946, residents got wind of the agency's plans to abandon Price's Bridge to the lake, and re-route the highway to a crossing several miles westward. Residents protested that the change would add fifteen to twenty miles from some parts of Lincoln County to the forty-mile trip to Augusta, and they assembled in significant numbers in March 1946 at the county courthouse, where they passed resolutions. Homer Legg, a double-office holder as an ordinary in Lincolnton as well as a county commissioner, was the ringleader, calling the courthouse meeting via a letter in the *Lincoln Journal*. When "Judge Legg" said people needed to come together, they responded.

The newspaper called the gathering a mass meeting that drew people from "practically every community" in Lincoln County, although it gave no crowd estimate. The residents resolved to ask the Corps either to keep Price's Bridge fully functional, or build a new bridge near it to preserve the route. They also agreed that Legg and a group of "prominent and public-spirited citizens" should be promptly dispatched to Augusta to seek the support of Lester Moody at the chamber of commerce and other civic leaders on the bridge issue. The fact that the residents specifically lobbied Moody and Hillary Mangum of the Augusta Merchant's Association to "use their offices and influence" to keep Price's Bridge showed their well-justified perception that the Augusta business community was a key player in the

Clarks Hill project. As it turned out, the Corps agreed to keep the river crossing intact by funding a new bridge nearby.¹⁷⁵

Four years later, citizens from a wider area around the lake pushed the Corps to do more extensive tree-clearing in the lake basin. Some 1,500 people signed a petition in spring 1950 against the selective clearing planned by the Corps, and residents from twelve counties attended a meeting in August in a “packed” courtroom in Lincolnton. Lester Moody presided at the meeting and introduced the division engineer for the Corps, who announced his agency in fact would change its policy as citizens had requested.

Land acquisition still was underway in summer 1950, and condemnation cases would proceed for several years for some parcels. The Reid siblings had yet to vacate their house and farm. But in the view of the Lincolnton newspaper, “all controversial issues had been removed” once the tree-clearing debate was settled. Residents had fought well and prevailed, and it was time to look forward to the benefits of the lake. “Everybody can shake hands now, forget the battle scars, and all pull together for the great things that are in store” for the region, the editor concluded.¹⁷⁶

In these episodes, citizens drew a line in the sand on narrowly defined issues. They could see a reasonable chance for success, and the Corps could concede because, in fact, the citizens had good arguments on those issues, and they were not threatening the overall project. Indeed, many people seemed to embrace the project, if opinion leaders like Legg or the *Journal* editor were a good indication. It cost the Corps more money to concede, but not

¹⁷⁵ “Judge Legg asks citizens to meet at court house Saturday,” *Lincoln Journal*, March 28, 1946; “Citizens protest losing Augusta ‘short route,’” *Lincoln Journal*, April 4, 1946; and Holloway and Pinson, interviews.

¹⁷⁶ “Army engineers describe new clearing projects,” *Lincoln Journal*, April 13, 1950; photo cutlines, *Lincoln Journal*, April 20, 1950; and “Army engineers agree to clearing policy,” *Lincoln Journal*, Aug. 31, 1950.

any of its authority to build the dam. The underlying sense was that the project was a done deal, and that people were inclined to choose their battles in the details.

Still, many people did object to the loss of their land and expressed themselves as individuals. Their expressions were meaningful to them if not effective in the long run in diverting the Corps from its course of action. For example, the Corps condemned about 2,640 acres in McCormick County owned by Annie Pearl Robinson, contending that the fair price for the land was \$129,000. Robinson was eighty years old and had a “mortal fear of going to court,” according to the Corps staff’s report on the case.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, she overcame her fear and challenged the price in the federal district court in Greenwood, S.C., where a jury decided in 1953 that the government should pay \$267,500. One of the witnesses for Robinson had put the land’s value at \$450,000, so the jury effectively split the difference between that figure and the government’s offer. Part of Robinson’s former land already was flooded by then – another reminder that the court was an arena for questioning the final price, but not the right of the government to take the land. And Robinson no doubt went to court in part to get more money for the land. But her actions also implied the federal government was wrong in at least some of its actions, in her view. The effect was both to acquiesce in the final authority of the federal government, without accepting that the Corps could do as it wished in all regards when acquiring land.

The tract was five miles southwest of McCormick, with a rolling topography cut by several creeks draining to the Savannah. It formed the western boundary “of a fairly well developed farming area” between McCormick and Plum Branch, S.C., according to the

¹⁷⁷ Report on court proceedings, acquisition file for Tract H-703, Mrs. Annie P. Robinson, Box 8 of 45 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

Corps assessment. There was a five-room main house in “fair” condition but with no paint or electric lights, and two tenant houses in “poor” and “very poor” shape. Three men, possibly with families, lived on the tract, Elbert Holmes in the main house and Ralph Holloway and Fred Fleming in the more decrepit tenant houses. These tenants were black, while the Robinsons were white. Noting but discounting the tenants’ presence, the federal agent stated, “There are only three negro tenants on this large tract taken.”¹⁷⁸ Already in a tenuous position as landless African-Americans in the Jim Crow South, the tenants on the Robinson place had little recourse but to find somewhere else to live.

Robinson’s husband, F.C. Robinson, had willed the land to her at his death in 1909, calling her his “faithful and affectionate wife” and placing the family land in her care. Robinson apparently did not live on the condemned land, most of which was covered by pine forest except for sixty acres cleared for crops. But the old homeplace of the Robinson family sat directly adjacent to the line of the property that the Corps had taken. Robinson’s nephew, Hugh C. Brown, wrote to the Corps in 1951 to say the two-story homeplace remained important to the family, and that he wanted the Corps to get rid of the notices it had posted on the house stating, incorrectly, that the house was government property. Brown, a state representative from McCormick, had become executive secretary of the Clarks Hill Authority in 1946, and he used authority letterhead for his letter to the Corps. Given his support for damming the Savannah, Brown perhaps was more willing than his aunt to see family land

¹⁷⁸ Report on court proceedings, file for Tract H-703, Robinson (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

taken for Clarks Hill. But he and the family still felt enough of a connection to the old house that they wanted it to be respected.¹⁷⁹

The Robinson tract had another layer of complexity: Members of the black Freeman family apparently had an ownership claim of some nature on the property. The records tell an incomplete story, but one document gives information about the “various owners” of the tract and lists forty-two members of the Freeman family over three generations. At the top of these family trees were brothers Berry and Jasper Freeman, and Janie Self, Jasper’s daughter. The other people were their heirs, such as the widow and ten children of Berry Freeman, and the five children of Janie Self.¹⁸⁰

The Freemans’ ownership claim on a portion of the Robinson tract likely began with Berry and Jasper Freeman. The two brothers and other Freemans were known around McCormick as skilled, diligent, land-owning farmers who tapped into federal programs when possible to boost their ownership, and records show the brothers each owned at least one other tract acquired by the Corps. Perhaps they had made partial payments to Robinson in the years before the Corps arrived, without fully completing the transaction. None of the Freemans were living on the tract in the late 1940s.¹⁸¹

It is puzzling that, while the Freemans were listed as “owners” in one document, they made no appearance in the summary of the jury trial. Some of Berry Freeman’s children still lived in McCormick, but others had moved to cities like Greenville, Charlotte and Asheville

¹⁷⁹ Letter from Hugh C. Brown to Corps, July 19, 1951, file for Tract H-703, Annie P. Robinson (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

¹⁸⁰ Acquisition file for tract H-703; Bobby Edmonds also provided a description of the Freemans in McCormick, telephone interview with author, June 2, 2009.

¹⁸¹ “Information relevant to the various owners of Tract H-703,” file for H-703; and land parcel log book, (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

in the Carolinas, Knoxville, Tenn., or northward to New York and Detroit. Janie Self had died, and her five children lived “somewhere in Florida,” the Corps records state. The heirs were scattered widely, and whether they knew or cared about the Robinson property, or if they received any money from the government’s final payment, was unclear. But, for purposes of the trial, the government apparently was able to simplify the ownership to Robinson, and perhaps left it to her to settle any claims with the Freemans.

The government had the power and sometimes saw the need to simplify cases in certain ways, in some instances lumping parcels together so it might process them more efficiently. In that sense, it reorganized the landscape to serve its interests. For example, the Corps initiated a condemnation case in 1948 that covered about 12,000 acres in Lincoln County. The SREC owned a large portion of that land, but other owners, such as several members of the Bussey family, had their land pulled into the case as well.¹⁸²

In another case, the government considered about 10,800 acres together, spanning Lincoln and four adjacent counties. The government had deposited \$326,486 with the U.S. District Court in Augusta in July 1950, which gave it ownership of the land. The condemnation case would determine whether a jury agreed that amount was adequate payment for the 10,800 acres. Members of the Dorn family owned several parcels within the total, such as forty-six acres they acquired in 1939 from the Peoples Bank of McCormick, which likely had foreclosed on the land. Brothers Martin G. and Joseph J. Dorn were prominent businessmen and landowners in the McCormick area, with enterprises such as

¹⁸² Legal notice for Civil Action No. 432, *Lincoln Journal*, Feb. 12, 1948.

several sawmills, wholesale and retail lumber sales, a cotton gin, and thousands of acres of cotton and timber lands.¹⁸³

But there were a number of other owners as well in that case. Eunice Motes Blanchard owned about one hundred acres in Columbia County, deeded to her by her husband in 1942, and valued by the government at \$2,500. I.W. Wilcher had purchased about ninety-five acres in 1940 with help from the Federal Land Bank in Columbia, and J.L. Clary amassed 222 acres with backing from the same bank – which meant the federal government would acquire the same land it had helped those men purchase a decade earlier. Robert L. Howell had amassed 3,038 acres in McDuffie County between 1917 and 1948, for which the government offered about \$120,000. Features like Hart Creek and Green Branch shaped Howell’s land and defined its boundaries, flowing into Little River and then the Savannah. Those rivers, in turn, were a factor in bringing his land into the hands of the government.¹⁸⁴

In Lincoln County, the Corps first contacted R.E. Edmunds in 1948 about its intention to acquire sixty-four acres he owned along Chamberlain Ferry Road, for which it offered \$1,050. The records seem to indicate Edmunds lived on the property in a six-room house with new paint, and that he would be able to keep the house and fifty-three acres. The neighborhood consisted of “white land owners and is a fair farming section,” although there was little active cultivation on the Edmunds property, the Corps agent stated.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Filings in U.S. District Court in Augusta, July 18, 1950, in *United States of America v. 10,848.42 acres in Columbia, Lincoln, McDuffie, Warren, Wilkes, and M.G. and J.J. Dorn Inc., et al.*; copies of filings in author’s possession; description of M.G. and J.J. Dorn in Edmonds, *McCormick County: Land of Cotton*, 124-147.

¹⁸⁴ Court filings, *USA v. 10,848.42 acres*.

¹⁸⁵ Files for tracts G-647, R.E. Edmunds, and G-649A and B, F.M. Parton, Box 8 of 45 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

Edmunds went back and forth a couple times with the Corps about the value of the land, with the Corps turning down his request to appraise the land again because it did not see any valid reason for that step. Edmunds said in early 1949 that he would think about it and get back in touch with the negotiator, but the Corps land office did not hear from him. The office had a similar experience with F.M. Parton, who owned eighty acres bordering on Edmunds's land. Parton, who did not live on the property, was contacted in November and December 1948. He said he would respond, but "as this promise was not kept," according to the land office, he was contacted again. Parton again said he would respond but did not, and the land office recommended moving ahead with taking the property, about two months after the first interchange with Parton. Whether they were seeking leverage on prices, trying to stall so they could decide what to do next, or naively hoping the Corps might just go away if they kept a low profile, these two neighboring landowners expressed a level of discontent. They certainly did not indicate eagerness to part with their property.¹⁸⁶

At the same time, the ploy of avoiding the land agent was both slightly comical and pathetic, suggestive of the limits on such owners' options. The land office recorded many such transaction details on its standard "Negotiator's Report," and owners like Edmunds and Parton were listed under the "vendor's name," a small irony in the implication that, as vendors, they came to the deal voluntarily, with something they wanted to sell. The truth was the Corps did negotiate to a degree. For example, it added \$450 each to the offers for the Edmunds and Parton tracts. But the Corps had the upper hand in deciding when the negotiation was over. The owner could not just walk away and end the transaction.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

The Edmunds family owned a fair amount of land, and the Corps acquired other parcels from them as well. For example, R.E. Edmunds and his mother, Leola, and his two siblings owned another ninety-five acres with a five-room house and farm buildings. The appraiser reported in March 1949 that the house was vacant but the owners were fixing it up so one of them, possibly Leola, could live there. The house was unpainted but had electric lights and indoor plumbing. Ten acres were being cultivated, another fifteen acres of fields were idle, and seventy acres were in pines. The Corps put the total value at \$2,750.

Mattie Jane Martin had willed the farm to Leola Edmunds and her children in 1915, nearly sixty years after the Martin family first acquired it within a larger tract. Leola probably was a Martin, although her maiden name was not recorded. In 1925, Leola and her son R.E. borrowed \$175 from the local Farmers State Bank at a rate of 8 percent, putting up the house and half the ninety-five acres to secure the loan. They borrowed the money in March at cotton-planting time, and it was due on Nov. 1, during the cotton harvest. The land carried family ties, and the Edmunds family had worked hard over thirty-five years and taken financial risks to keep it.¹⁸⁷

Joe Holloway Jr. made no bones about his view of what the Corps did in gaining land from his family in 1949. It was not a matter of the federal government “acquiring” or “buying” property or even “condemning” it. The government “stole” the land for Clarks Hill, in his view. “Sure they did, sure they did,” contended Holloway, who sounded more adamant than bitter when he made this point. “My daddy thought he had to sell it, whatever they offered him, that he had to take (the offered price).” For one portion of the property, the

¹⁸⁷ Acquisition file for Tract G-646, Leola Edmunds and children (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

Corps had offered about \$21.60 per acre, in an area where the appraiser stated that soil conditions “on the whole are good.”¹⁸⁸

In Holloway’s recollection, the federal government took unfair advantage of his father by forcing him to sell the land in the first place, and also by giving the impression that the price the Corps offered was the only option. In that sense, he placed his family within the category of people described by Bobby Edmonds, who felt they did not have the option of resisting the federal government. Holloway claimed his father did not realize he had the choice of rejecting the price offered by the Corps and suggesting an alternative price, or possibly taking the price question to court.

Considering that many adjacent landowners in the community also were dealing with the Corps, it seems likely that, in the churches and the crossroads stores, there would have been a lot of talk among neighbors about dealings with the Corps. Surely the option of contesting the government’s offer came up in such discussions. Holloway himself mentioned the Dunn brothers, who went to court over the price offered for their land near Little River. The Dunns were awarded another twelve dollars per acre, but once they paid their legal costs, Holloway added, they had gained no real advantage.¹⁸⁹

Holloway’s memory about his father not being aware of that option could be inaccurate, or perhaps his father indeed said that after the fact, out of anger or embarrassment that he had not challenged the price. He also might have accepted the government offer fairly quickly,

¹⁸⁸ Holloway, interview; and acquisition file for Tract G-606, J.M. Holloway (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

¹⁸⁹ Holloway, interview.

before word spread of cases like that of the Dunns. Ultimately, the family was not happy about losing its land, and the money the government paid was not a lasting consolation.

Nona Searles Poland died on Christmas Eve 1944 – just two days after President Roosevelt signed the Flood Control Act that authorized Clarks Hill. She left behind her husband, T.A. Poland, three children, and an estate with several thousand acres of land in Lincoln and Columbia counties, including Searles Island in the Savannah River. Five years later, the Corps condemned about 1,100 acres of the land in Poland’s estate for the lake.¹⁹⁰

Nona Poland had been the last direct heir of her parents, John and Frances Searles, who once owned many thousands of acres along the two rivers. By 1923, Nona Poland’s parents both had passed away, along with her five siblings, none of whom had children. She had been the last living Searles in that branch of the family. The land in her estate was a link for Nona’s husband and children, back to Nona and her parents.

The jury trial on the Poland land took place in April 1951. The government’s lawyer was Charles D. Russell, special assistant to the Attorney General who participated in many of the condemnation cases, while the Polands hired Clement E. Sutton, a lawyer from the small, nearby town of Washington, Ga. The government brought in five appraisers to testify on the land’s value, and the Polands, who legally were defendants in the case, had four witnesses – two of Nona’s sons, a plywood and real-estate broker from McCormick, and a longtime resident of the area who professed a strong knowledge of local land and timber values. The first witness for the Polands estimated the value at \$40 an acre, more than twice the government’s offer. The next witness said \$45 an acre, and the third witness, one of the

¹⁹⁰ Acquisition file for Tract G-614, PS-5, Nona Searles Poland Estate (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

Poland boys, suggested \$50 was the fair number, which must have evoked some chuckles in the courtroom. Their fourth witness came back down to \$37 an acre, but the jury apparently was not as sympathetic as the panel in the Robinson case. It awarded roughly \$19 an acre, not much better than the government's offer.¹⁹¹

The Twin City Power Company had more financial resources than many individual owners like the Holloways or Polands. In addition, Twin City likely had financial backing from the Savannah River Electric Co., since the SREC had planned to fold the Twin City acreage into its land for a reservoir. Nevertheless, while Twin City had some interesting successes against the federal government in the lower court, eventually the government prevailed. And throughout the court process, as for other owners, the ultimate question was what Twin City would be paid for its land, not whether the land could be taken.

About 4,700 acres controlled by Twin City along both sides of the river were at issue. Initial court decisions favored Twin City, which had argued that the "just compensation" for its land, guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, should be based on its value in a hydropower project. A judge initially appointed commissioners to appraise the land, and their take was that the land was worth about \$267 an acre if the potential for water power were factored in, compared to just \$37 an acre otherwise. Faced with those numbers, the government predictably appealed the ruling that Twin City indeed should be paid at the higher value, but the U.S. Court of Appeals backed Twin City in April 1955.

The government employed a range of arguments, such as the contention that, since Twin City did not own the water power value of the river itself, the value of its land should not be

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

tied to hydropower. It argued the clear authority of the federal government over navigation on waterways should work in its favor in setting the compensation for land along the Savannah. Nevertheless, the appeals court stood by the ruling that Twin City deserved the higher compensation for the land, which it agreed was associated with “one of the best undeveloped hydropower sites” in the eastern U.S. The federal government, however, caught a break in its final appeal, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in January 1956 that the value should not factor in the hydropower potential after all, in part because the navigation responsibilities of the Corps did in fact trump other concerns and claims.¹⁹²

The people who lost land for Clarks Hill refrained from any organized resistance for a range of reasons. Some were pleased to sell their land, or they were open to the changes the lake would bring and interested in its potential benefits. But the power of the federal government loomed as the dominant factor, limiting the options of those who did not want to sell. People could negotiate the edges of the government’s authority through steps like arguing land values in court, but the system put them on the defensive from the start, as soon as surveyors marked the acquisition boundaries that encompassed their land.

¹⁹² “United States of America v. Twin City Power Company of Georgia et al.,” <http://cases.justia.com/us-court-of-appeals/F2/221/299/273874/> and “United States of America v. Twin City Power Company of Georgia and William P. Dauchy, its Mortgagee, appellees,” <http://cases.justia.com/us-court-of-appeals/F2/215/592/55375/> (both accessed June 3, 2009); and “United States v. Twin City Power Co., 350 U.S. 222 (1956),” <http://supreme.justia.com/us/350/222/case.html> (accessed June 29, 2009).

CONCLUSION:

Misled by Names

As the concrete mass of Clarks Hill Dam took shape, it was a popular spot for standing and pondering the transformed scene to the north, where the river's water spread over the hilly land. Atlanta reporter Andrew Sparks stood there in late summer 1952, three months before the first power generator went into operation, and described the lake as miraculous and ocean-like. Lucy Hamilton Howard admired the view from the dam in 1952 as well, and pronounced the project a major improvement to the river, which she had seen before as either unattractively sluggish, or highly destructive in its flood stage.

Even at its best, Howard felt, the river was ugly with its constant load of red silt. At its worst, the river was a menace, a "raging monster" that damaged crops in the valley as well as Augusta's main business and residential district. The floods killed people in some cases, and also damaged the city's reputation, according to Howard. "Back 30 years ago, the old stream was a liability to the valley," she wrote in June 1952 in the *Augusta Chronicle*. "Nobody loved it – that is, nobody but Tom." She referred to Thomas Hamilton, her brother and the former *Chronicle* editor who had promoted development of the river so adamantly until his death in 1937.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Lucy Hamilton Howard, "Childhood influences of Tom Hamilton played role in CSRA development," *Augusta Chronicle*, June 22, 1952; also see Bell and Crabbe, *The Augusta Chronicle*, 154-55; and Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 426.

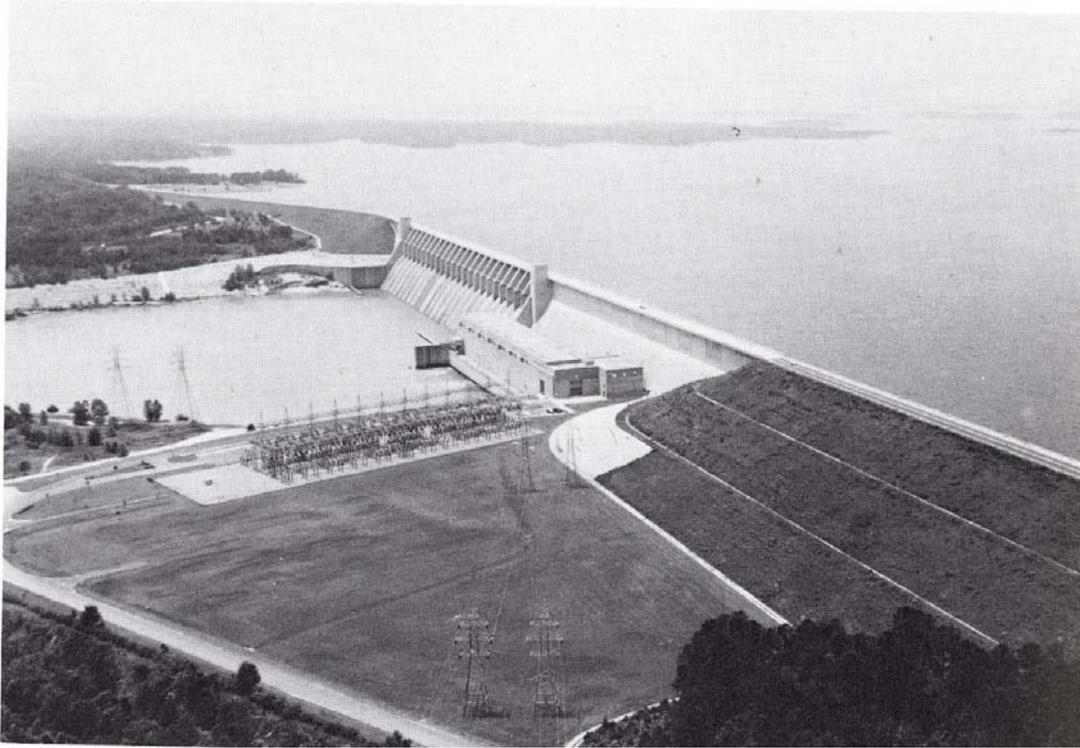


Figure 8: Clarks Hill Dam upon completion, with power plant and lines below dam. Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 426.

Howard seemed determined to inscribe her brother's legacy in ink, to make sure that he received due credit for his relentless pursuit of Clarks Hill and other engineering works on the river. The love that she attributed to Hamilton was not a love for the Savannah in its more natural, pre-dam form, but an appreciation for untapped value in the river. As Clarks Hill came to fruition, Howard contended, the "people of the valley and its hinterlands" developed a strong trust in her brother's vision for the region. When she took in the view from the dam,

two things came to mind for her – the beauty of the hilly topography that the lake accented, and the many benefits that Hamilton had promised would flow from the lake.¹⁹⁴

As for the people affected by the land acquisitions, if Howard was conscious of them, she did not express it in her ode to Hamilton. She must have been aware of those people to some extent, given her general knowledge of the project. But she could not directly empathize with their experiences. The farm where the Hamiltons grew up was in Columbia County, about twenty miles northwest of Augusta. The Corps acquired a number of parcels along that county's border with Lincoln, where Little River and a couple of its tributaries flowed, but the Hamilton land was outside the acquisition zone, and the siblings still owned it in 1952.¹⁹⁵

For some observers like Howard, awareness of the landowners and occupants, the structures such as homes and barns, and the landscape they had formed already was fading by the early 1950s. This study has attempted to bring them back into focus, find meaning in their experiences, and reclaim space for them in the story of Clarks Hill. It has argued that the federal government was both correct and off the mark in its portrayal of the area it acquired for the lake. Unquestionably, many landowners in the lake basin had reduced or ended their farming operations, and tenants had moved to nearby towns or to more distant points. Joe Holloway Jr., once his father's right-hand man on the farm, started his own pulpwood-hauling business after he came home from the army. Larry Pinson, who had worked in his father's cotton fields as a kid, took a job with Southern Railroad and moved away, while his father farmed less and commuted to the Savannah River Site to work on its construction.

¹⁹⁴ Howard, "Childhood influences," *Augusta Chronicle*, June 22, 1952.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

But this study has found that life on the acquired lands was richer than the government indicated, at least in some of its earlier assessments. More people lived there, they were a more diverse group, they felt stronger connections to the land and saw more potential in it for the future. It was not a used-up, vacant, and valueless landscape.

This perhaps became more apparent or significant to some people in the lake area after the fact, once the transformation was complete. The *Lincolnton* newspaper, for example, had been a source of strident support for damming the Savannah River, although it had argued at one point for allowing the private SREC to do it. However, in 1961, after the Corps auctioned off about 10,600 acres of its property around the lake that it deemed surplus, the move was blasted by *Journal* editor John P. Drinkard Jr., who had taken over for his father. He expressed outrage that, before the auction, the former owners did not get a chance to buy back land the government had acquired from them. Land for which the government had paid \$18 to \$20 an acre went for about \$117 an acre, Drinkard reported. The land once contained “homes and farms that [people] had lived on all their lives, raised families, or were raising them; land that had come down from generation to generation; places of family pride, history and ‘prosperity,’” he observed. He called on readers to protest the auction and future auctions, to write to U.S. senators Herman Talmadge or Richard B. Russell, so that the “rightful owners” of any other properties to be auctioned could buy them back at a fair price if they so desired.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ John P. Drinkard Jr., “‘Stolen’ land sells high; former owners didn’t stand a chance,” editorial, *Lincoln Journal*, June 1, 1961; for description of some of the surplus tracts, see Corps of Engineers, “Real Estate – Clark Hill Lake – Segment Index,” a map dated Dec. 14, 1949, and revised between 1965 and 1977 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).

This study also offers a counter to the view, represented by Howard in her newspaper piece, that no one had much cared for the river in its pre-dam state. Bobby Edmonds and his father certainly did, as did Joe Holloway and his naked-fishing friends, and others who found fun, adventure, bonding, and nutrition in the river. Their interactions with the river were vital enough that they remembered them in detail some sixty-five to seventy years later.

Howard was not incapable of appreciating a natural feature such as a waterway. In a *Chronicle* photograph, she stood next to a creek on the Hamilton land that she called “a beautiful little stream fed by three cold springs.” There were many such smaller, spring-fed streams in the area with less sediment than the main river, including some that still ran quite clear in places where the tree cover prevented erosion. Howard had fond memories tied to interactions with the stream on her family’s place, as it was the location of the swimming hole where her brother, cousins, friends, and eventually she and her sisters, frolicked in hot weather. She saw inherent beauty in the stream, but at the same time, her appreciation relied on the small-scale manipulation of the stream that created the swimming spot.¹⁹⁷

If Howard overlooked a layer of history when she stood on the dam, this thesis admittedly has left a deeper layer of the past unexplored. The author chose largely to pass over the Native American history of the Savannah valley in order to set a reasonable scope for the study, but not because he discounted the importance of that history. The Hamilton property contained a thread leading to the earlier history, in that the family’s favorite stream connected to Uchee Creek, which flowed into the Savannah downriver of Clarks Hill.

¹⁹⁷ Howard, “Childhood influences.” The clear streams in the reservoir area are mentioned in “Master Plan for Development Clark Hill Reservoir,” 8.

Uchee likely was an alternate spelling for Yuchi, the name of one of many Native American groups who lived in the piedmont and uplands of the Savannah valley before and during European settlement. Native groups like the Apalachees, Iswas, and Chickasaws lived there as well on both sides of the river. The Savannah River itself owed its name to the Shawnee or Savannah Indians, who gained a measure of prominence in the seventeenth century by nearly wiping out the Westo tribe whose name the river had carried previously.¹⁹⁸ Throughout the watershed of the Savannah River, waterways like the Tugaloo, the Chattooga, and the Seneca reflected both the past prevalence of the Indians, and their own, devastating experience of dispossession.¹⁹⁹

In the time of Clarks Hill Dam, residents in the area had at least a dim awareness of the native past, prompted by reminders like the countless arrowheads Larry Pinson found as a child in the plowed fields of Double Branches. Bobby Edmonds also had an impressive collection of arrowheads that filled more than a dozen shadow boxes on the walls of his office, and Ben Fortson had a favorite place for hunting arrowheads when the lake level dropped. Yet, residents did not necessarily think in depth about why the living Indian cultures were long gone, and only artifacts and creek names remained.

¹⁹⁸ The Shawnee name has variations such as Shawanee, Shawano, Shavano, and Savano, which shines light on the linguistic connection between Shawnee and Savannah, according to the Georgia River Network, "Savannah River Basin," http://www.garivers.org/pdf_files/river_basin_facts/Savannah1.pdf (accessed July 4, 2009).

¹⁹⁹ John R. Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 11, 34, 46 and 184; also see Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 197; Julia F. Smith, "The Savannah River," in Richard Bartlett, ed., *Rolling Rivers*, 82; J. Leitch Wright Jr., *The Only Land They Knew: American Indians in the Old South* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 105-6 and 231; and map at "Columbia County – 2001," <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/histcountymaps/columbia2001map.htm> (accessed June 30, 2009).

The awareness of the native past was limited, and in some ways, imperfect. One of the streams running south from Double Branches and into Little River was called Cherokee Creek. However, histories of the southeastern Indians typically do not show the Cherokees living that far south in Georgia. It was the Lower Creeks and the tribes confederated with them who dominated the area, while the Cherokees had their key towns in the mountainous areas of northern Georgia and the Carolinas. William Bartram observed in 1773 that “the Savanna river and its waters were acknowledged to be the natural and just bounds of territory betwixt the Cherokees and [Creeks].” In other words, the Cherokees held sway in the northern headwaters of the river, and the Creeks below the point where the tributaries formed the main stem of the Savannah.²⁰⁰

Certainly, the Cherokees traveled to the region around Augusta for trade and other purposes. In 1773, a hundred or so Cherokee representatives came to Augusta for a congress focusing on trade debts that Georgia merchants claimed the Indians owed them. Some three hundred Creeks attended as well. The result was the “New Purchase Cession,” by which the Creeks and Cherokees ceded more than 2 million acres of land to the colony of Georgia to settle the debts, likely under coercion by colonial authorities. Within Creek territory, the ceded land was bordered on the south by Little River, so it included the land from which Lincoln County was created about twenty-six years later. In other words, this was the earlier

²⁰⁰ Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund, eds., *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 113.

dispossession that made Lincoln and adjacent counties possible, and allowed communities like Double Branches to develop.²⁰¹

The people who put the Cherokee name on a stream in southern Lincoln left a hint at the native past, but not a reliable clue to the specific native people and their culture that had existed in that area. Likewise, about ten miles to the south, naming a long rise above the river for mid-nineteenth century farmer and storeowner John Mulford Clark obscured the native history of that particular spot. On the other hand, as the decades passed, place names such as Clarks Hill came to be markers of another meaningful layer of history. Congress continued the cycle of new names and obscured history when it re-labeled the hydropower project the J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake in 1987.²⁰²

The name change was at once fitting, problematic, and ironic. It made sense in that it reflected the prominence of Thurmond and the favor he had built up among many of his constituents in South Carolina over the decades. The change was problematic because other people who interacted with the lake, particularly in Georgia, did not care for the new name, and the fact was that Thurmond, while an advocate for the dam, was not its longest and most important proponent. In addition, with the renaming, Congress granted a relatively prominent honor to a man who made his early advances in national politics by fighting to keep racial segregation intact in the South, becoming the “most energetic, vocal, and consistent

²⁰¹ Waselkov, *William Bartram*, 12-13, 37-38, and 112-13; Lincoln County was created in 1796 and named for Benjamin Lincoln, a Revolutionary War general.

²⁰² “‘Damscam’ Creates Flood of Protests,” *Savannah News-Press*, Feb. 28, 1988; description of John M. Clark and origins of the Clarks Hill name in Bobby Edmonds, *The Making of McCormick County* (McCormick, SC: Cedar Hill Unlimited, 1999), 389.

defender” of that cause, in the words of one biographer.²⁰³ Finally, the change ironically put Thurmond’s name on a large-scale intervention by the federal government, even though he had often decried efforts by the federal government to intervene in southern affairs, at least in some aspects of life. The story was deeper and wider than the name would have us believe.

²⁰³ Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 12; Cohodas cites one of the better-known quotes from Thurmond during the Dixiecrat campaign of 1948: “They (blacks) themselves do not want social intermingling. They are entitled to equality of opportunity, and they will get it through our efforts. But all the laws of Washington and all the bayonets of the army cannot force the Negro into our homes, our schools, our churches, and our places of recreation.” (146); also see Jack Bass and Marilyn Thompson, *Ol’ Strom: An Unauthorized Biography of Strom Thurmond* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1998).

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